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# ***On the other side of shame***

A non-fiction account

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## **ABSTRACT**

Lynette Langman's telephone rang on a Sunday night in 2001, heralding the call that would unravel her life.

For forty long years, she had waited to hear news about the son she gave up for adoption when she was virtually a child herself. His birth had remained a closely guarded secret, hidden even from those who knew her best. And now his disclosure would unleash years of bottled questions and confessions.

As a young girl growing up in 1960's South Africa, Lynette knew that her illegitimate pregnancy would be a scandal from which her conservative Jewish family would never recover. She hid her condition until she was seven months pregnant, and already a long way from childhood innocence.

When her parents finally discovered the truth, the baby's adoption was a foregone conclusion; they would not consider any alternative, including that of marriage between Lynette and her then-boyfriend Max. For the young lovers, it was an early trial that forged a bond which remains unbroken. They eventually did marry – a mere 18 months after the birth and surrender of their first child.

Lynette and her long-lost son – born David, renamed Antony on adoption – lived parallel lives for 40 years until Antony himself, now married and living in the United States, decided to adopt a baby. His preparation for the adoption brought him face-to-face with the unresolved questions and raw shame that biological mothers feel on giving up a child, and he became determined to find his own birth mother.



Antony's attitude and emotional responses to his birth mother are unique, as are the stories that have unfolded since their reunion. Shielded identities and the barriers of a conservative age ensured that mother and son never consciously crossed paths in those 40 years, yet a string of uncanny coincidences through that time signalled a deeper connection.

This non-fiction dissertation maps Lynette's journey against Antony's. It is narrated by the various players in a story which resonates as deeply with human emotion as it does with social commentary. Set primarily against the backdrop of Cape Town, from the 1960's to the present day, it hooks into the enduring traditions of the Jewish community and examines the intricacies of the adoption/reunion saga through the eyes of those most deeply affected, highlighting the peculiarities which make this story unique.

Research was conducted by means of extensive face-to-face, telephonic and email interviews. The research material was moulded to provide a creative and accurate account of events and characters. Photographic material was provided by members of the families involved, or referenced where appropriate.

*On the other side of shame* recounts a story which sits with its heels in the stirrups of social custom and its head in the clouds of familial love.

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## INTRODUCTION

Is it the writer who chooses the story, or the other way around?

I found this particular story as a result of seemingly arbitrary circumstances. My hairdresser wanted me to meet his client who was looking for someone to write up a “remarkable life history”. His client’s name: Lynette.

Intrigued to hear the story and eager for a new project, I agreed that he could arrange for me to meet this client at a local coffee shop. While waiting for ‘Lynette’ to arrive, I was surprised to see my cousin – a relative with whom I’d had little contact but whose ties to my family were immediate and warm. My cousin’s name: Lynette... Lynette Langman.

Thus unfolded a secret history, enthralling me both as a writer and a relative.

This is a story which takes its written form by virtue of some careful manoeuvring on the author’s part. I have drawn on the style of authors such as Studs Terkel and Tony Parker – masters of a particular brand of oral history which places the interview at the heart of the telling. Interviewees are encouraged to talk, ramble, digress, deliberate, pontificate at will; the writer’s role is to listen, engage, record and to guide without influence. He must choose his

cast, and follow leads and trails to their ends. Once the telling is exhausted, the writer must sift through the material as a prospector through silt, searching for the rough-cut gems at the story's core. These are then polished – but only insofar as they tell a clearer version of the truth – and structured with the utmost care to provide that which every reader seeks: a good narrative. It is in this act of shaping and sorting that the truly creative non-fiction process lies. The writer must manage split allegiances: to the storytellers, he must promise not to ride roughshod over their deepest feelings, while to the readers, he must promise a riveting ride – even if it means discarding the less significant nuggets. To both, he must swear integrity. He must create plot and intrigue in places where real life often dispenses with such machinations. He may insert himself, as interpreter or guide, but his storytellers are his characters, verbatim. And he must massage the truth for its finest telling. Having set out this paradigm, that the voices of the 'characters' should tell the story, the texture of the story then becomes the interplay of their perceptions and accounts. And as there are complex strains to their narrative, the authorial imperative is to give the fullest expression to this complexity in the early unfolding of the text. It is, after all, in the varied and various approaches to the truth that the narrative gathers its strength and integrity.

So this is a story in which I have inhabited the neverland between journalist and novelist. The hurdles are unique: knowing what material to reject; being unable to talk to characters who are deceased, or not accessible; honouring a character's desire to talk "off the record" yet wishing to reveal those very secrets because they shed such light on motives or events; conducting interviews across oceans, using such technology as internet chat or Voice-Over-IP, and worrying about what might be lost in the digital telling; distinguishing the gloss of memory from the grime of real life, always toeing the blurred line between fiction and non-fiction that is inherent in memoir.

I did identify with my characters, particularly Lynette Langman, with whom I had the most contact and whose idea it was to write this story in the first place. At times, I did align myself with her judgement. At times, I was tempted to euphemise my impressions: I was afraid of upsetting the living characters, and others who know them, with hard truths. But this is a story about humanity – or rather, humaneness – and ultimately I honoured that. The editing process, and the input of others wiser than I am, ensured that I forced my hand and told the

truth that could be told, using a method where bias can not hide. And it is in rigorously adhering to this convention that I necessarily encountered certain limitations. For instance, the 'characters' reveal themselves, and because they are being interviewed they present themselves as they wish to be re-presented in the text. Consequently, the journalist/writer is left having to render their characteristics through the juxtaposition of points of view, especially in relation to shared events. This is far from ideal. But the dictates of non-fiction mean that the author cannot interfere. Thus Antony, for instance, appears to be too good to be true. Some of the other characters allude to his traits but they are restrained and certainly Antony is careful to present himself in a most favourable light. Perhaps the subtlety of the Terkel/Parker approach is to suggest that those who so strenuously control their stories have the most to hide.

Again, the apparent simplicity of this style of narrative is deceptive, and therein lies its merit. It is an approach which allows the writer to tackle a complex web of issues without intimidating the reader, preferring rather to draw the reader in to human experience, break down barriers through word-of-mouth telling, and facilitate identification through empathy. This way, deep-seated issues and complex analyses become a *fait accompli*, even without the reader's explicit realisation. Indeed, the style of this approach is evident even in the suggestive titles of such Studs Terkel works as *Working: People Talk about What they Do All Day and How They Feel about What They Do* (The New Press, 1974), and *Race: How Blacks and Whites Think and Feel About the American Obsession* (Anchor Books, 1992): they headline a method which is colloquial without being flippant, personal without being invasive. This is exploratory academics; it applies the fine intimacies of individual subjectivity to the broad brushstroke of universal experience. With creative subtlety, this style glorifies the mundane, turning the prosaic into something worth thinking and writing about.

This is a story about everyday people and their extraordinary experience. It is a story about adoption and reunion, and the laden years in between. It is told in the words of those who were there, in particular the protagonists Lynette Langman and Antony Egnal. Both Lynette and Antony are greatly given to warmth and affection – often to a degree which is

overwhelmingly sentimental. It seems that they share a genetically inherited capacity for expansive love – it radiates through kith and kin, sometimes catapulting the narratives into the realm of barely believable fiction. But this is a work of non-fiction, and their sentiments are genuine.

This is a story about coincidence, if there is such a thing. It weaves an insistent skein throughout, from my meeting Lynette, to the reunion between a long-lost son and his biological mother, and beyond. It is so consistently at work, that it becomes a character in itself and demands attention in the foreground.

This is a story about changing times. In many respects, the conservatism of the 1960s has metamorphosed into the tolerance with which we are so familiar today, leaving our contemporary selves astounded at the mere possibility that sagas such as Lynette's could ever have happened. So greatly have attitudes changed over the last 40 years, that today we regard this story as a story, rather than as the heresy it once was.

Above all, this is a story about families, and the ties that bind us – both because, and in spite of, our best efforts. There is no shortage of effort in this tale: it strongly attests the endeavour to preserve the units of family, even when they have been rent asunder. It is a story about Jewish families in particular, with their boundless scope for finding connections in divisions, bearing grudges for centuries, and healing all with chicken soup. The Jewish community of Cape Town is a small, but vibrant one. Its history is shared and its secrets are seldom long-kept. I find it astounding that this story remained unrevealed for as long as it did.

There are lessons buried not too far below the surface of these pages, on the other side of shame. Lessons, and a happy ending. But this is a story which began where it ended, and begged questions which continued to intrigue me, even after all was told.

Joanne Jowell

## **PART ONE**

University of Cape Town

## THE CALL

**H**e is a doctor, accustomed to confidence. Yet his hand quivers slightly as he dials the South African phone number now committed to memory. These people are strangers. What will he say? How will he introduce himself? The well-rehearsed words seem hollow and he is tempted to put down the receiver. No, he's done that twice before. Fortune favours the brave.

Antony Egnal takes a sip from a bottle of mineral water, swallowing quickly before the call connects. It is Sunday morning on a sweltering Seattle summer's day. Outside, his wife René is rearranging the garden furniture, leaving him in private. Antony's face, usually broad with a distinctive gap-toothed smile, is firmly set. He beats an impatient rhythm with his fingers.

A few months ago, he could not have imagined making this call. He had no need, not even a desire. But things have changed.

Now he's 40 years old, an established family man, about to meet his mother for the first time...





Antony

## YOU DON'T FIND YOUR CHILD, YOUR CHILD FINDS YOU

**M**y correspondence with Antony takes place via email, telephone and dictaphone. To him, I am a stranger; he did not ask me to tell his story – his mother did; he did not ask me to dredge up the facts of the past – his mother did. Yet he answers my questions readily, setting aside time to respond.

Antony grew up in Johannesburg, South Africa, the adopted son of loving parents to whom he was a 'gift'. He studied medicine in Cape Town, a city in which he felt happily at ease, but he and his wife René ultimately settled in Seattle on America's west coast. It is easy to see why a boy who loves Cape Town would love Seattle. His Table Mountain is replaced by Mt Rainier, sky-high and capped with snow. As yachts and boats cruised his Table Bay, so they glide through Elliott Bay and Seattle's myriad waterways. He gives up melktert and

*Kirstenbosch Gardens for coffee and Rose Gardens. Here he can canoe, hike, and jog with the same outdoor abandon. The city is famous for being wet, but Seattle embraces its rain. On days when even the 605 foot Space Needle can't poke its eye above the clouds, locals prefer to swim, climb, dive and cycle happily in the mist. The cobblestones of Pike Place glisten with a constant moisture; you can almost hear the clatter of erstwhile wagons making their way to the farmers' market where bargains on leeks and lettuces persist even today. Antony loves this city, and has made it home.*

Antony:

I found Seattle in January 1992. At the time, René and I were living in Wilmington, Delaware. I had finished my residency in family medicine and was teaching in Wilmington's Department of Family Medicine. Ren worked as a radiographer at the same hospital. We spent three and a half years there and we worked hard. Ren hated the politics at the hospital but she stuck it out while I slogged through my residency. There was a small Jewish population and we did have a few friends who became like family. I only had one weekend off a month which we used to see as much of the Eastern seaboard as possible. We travelled to Maine, New England, New York, Washington and Baltimore. But we knew we couldn't live in Delaware forever. It wasn't the place we wanted to have a family.

On that trip to Seattle, when the airplane touched down at Tacoma International Airport, I could see the most beautiful view over the water. I headed to the downtown area, crossing the bridge over Lake Washington, and spent the afternoon on the Eastern shore. I called René that evening. "Ren," I said, "I've found our new home." The place instantly felt right. I was offered a job in that week and we've never looked back...

The move to Seattle marked the beginning of the most trying and fascinating years of my life. For quite a while, even since the latter parts of my residency, René and I had been trying to have a baby. We kept hoping that Ren would fall pregnant and then kept being disappointed when she didn't. It became evident early on that it wasn't going to be easy.

About six months after arriving in Seattle, René fell pregnant. But within six weeks she had a miscarriage and we had to keep on trying. The miscarriage brought such a sense of loss, but

we knew we had to focus on trying again. We had so much hope and expectation, yet we also knew that pressure would only make things worse. It was a tough process of hope and disappointment.

Eventually, after a whole year of trying without luck, we knew we had to seek treatment. We consulted a fertility specialist and realised that our best chance was in vitro fertilisation – the process whereby René's egg and my sperm would be harvested, fertilised outside the body and then implanted in her womb. The whole procedure was expensive and it was something we thought long and hard about, but we were desperate to have a child. At that stage, adoption was not something that we spoke about; we still wanted to believe that we could have a child of our own. So we had our hearts set on the test-tube option.

Every patient undergoing fertility treatment is different in terms of age, weight, medical history etc. A fertility specialist evaluates each patient and makes an educated decision on what medications should be used to treat her. There are a few different drugs which can be used, but they may need to be adjusted in the case of successive attempts. When we were going through the process, each cycle of in vitro cost about \$10 000! Before treatment begins, the specialist sets up a 'protocol' – specific for that patient and that particular cycle of treatment – which outlines which drug to give, when to administer the drugs and what doses to use. So we had our protocol drawn up and went through our first cycle, nervous and excited. But it failed.

After a failed cycle, one should ideally give one's body a break and take a month off before starting the next cycle. René's doctor was going to be away, so he offered us the option of working with another physician or waiting yet another month, which we decided to do. Before undergoing a new round of fertility testing, the specialist always checks to make sure the patient hasn't gotten pregnant on her own already as the drugs can cause problems. This is called the 'base-line pre-treatment pregnancy test'. I wasn't sure when René was having her base-line test, but I tried to keep a logical, physician's perspective. It was difficult. This was an emotional experience and it was hard to stay objective.

One morning in August 1994, I went in to work as usual. I remember it was around the time of my birthday which is August 9<sup>th</sup>, and we were making plans to go to a free outdoor

concert to celebrate. In summer, that is one of the perks of Seattle: concerts take place weekly on the shores of Lake Washington in a gorgeous setting.

When I arrived at the clinic that morning, one of my staff tapped me on the shoulder and asked if she could speak to me privately. I assumed this was to do with clinic business because part of my role was to manage personnel. I showed her into my office and sat down. She was a delightful single lady in her mid 40s, one of our front-desk workers. She was working temporarily in my department at the same time as putting herself through school to become a social worker.

She sat down across from me, clutching a brown envelope, and began to talk:

“Dr Egnal,” she said, “I have something to tell you...It might sound strange, but I have been given a gift. The gift of seeing. I am of Indian descent and we believe strongly in such things as dreams. But seldom are my dreams as clear as this one I had about you.

“A few weeks ago I dreamed of your wife with a baby. I was not able to see the baby’s exact features, but I knew it was a girl. I knew she was a small, beautiful baby girl with dark dark hair.

“I woke up the next morning and went for a walk,” she continued. “On the ground, I noticed a beautiful duck feather. When I bent to pick it up, I realised that this feather was unique because it was perfectly formed. Did you know that? That those feathers which are shed are easily damaged so it is unusual to find one that is perfectly intact?”

I shook my head.

“Well I took the feather home and put it next to my bed. And that night, I dreamed once more. Again I dreamed of you and the baby. Again the small girl child with dark hair. Again you and your wife. The dream was so vivid and so clear. I knew I had to speak to you. And I want you to have this feather...”

She presented me with the most beautiful feather. She had also taken some loose hide to make tassels which she tied to the feather. She had placed red and white beads on the tassels: red to symbolise menstrual flow and white to symbolise semen. Then she thanked me for listening and walked out.

I sat there for a while after she left, unsure of what to make of this story. Later that evening, while I was waiting for René to pick me up, I told my one partner Denise about what had happened. While I was talking, Ren walked in and stood there listening. As the story unfolded, I saw tears rolling down her cheeks and just heard the words coming out her mouth: “I am, I am, I am...” I didn’t understand, but she let me finish the story and then ran over to give me a hug and tell me what she had done that day.

Earlier, she had gotten a call from the doctor’s office to say that she should come in her for base-line pregnancy test that afternoon. Later on, she got a call back to say that she would not need any infertility work: she had miraculously fallen pregnant on her own – obviously with my help, but without any drugs!

The pregnancy was thankfully a healthy one, and nine months later my daughter Yael Simone Egnal was born with a thick black mop of hair. Just like in the dream. We named her after the biblical Yael. Part of that name is derived from the word ‘*aliyah*’ which means ‘to go up to a higher place.’ As the Japanese said, there is no reason not to put pressure on your expectations! My daughter’s middle name is Simone, from the Hebrew word ‘*shimone*’ which means ‘G-d heard our prayers’ and allowed us to have a child. Yael certainly was an answer to a prayer...And that tasselled feather now sits in a glass case in her bedroom.

With all the elation at the birth of my daughter came a deep sadness. Because my parents never lived to see her. I had left South Africa in 1987 – almost eight years prior to Yael’s birth – and within a year of my leaving, my mother took gravely ill with a liver and pancreatic problem which steadily worsened. I went back to South Africa when she was admitted to hospital. She lived for four weeks on a ventilator at Groote Schuur Hospital in Cape Town and then died at the age of 52.

My father succumbed to deep despair after her passing. He depended on her for everything and could not stand life without her. Over the next few years, he was in and out of hospital, battling severe depression until he finally made his own choice. He was a pharmacist, so he had direct access to medication; he overdosed on pills and, at the age of only 53, took his own life.

How to describe the sense of loss when your parents die? It's a feeling of losing anchor, being rootless. And of course I battled guilt at leaving them behind in South Africa even though I could justify all my reasons. But mostly, I felt lost – like a little boy.

I no longer had two of the most wonderful people in my life. And what I regretted bitterly is that they never had the chance to see their grandchild, never had the chance to *klaib nachas* from the life René and I had forged for ourselves, much of which is based on their foundations and teachings. They gave me a life I could be proud of, an education second to none, and a love I will strive my whole life to emulate.

*Antony's tone, in voice and in writing, is always tender when he refers to his parents Joe and Selma Egnal. He uses words like 'bond', 'warm', and 'loving' repeatedly. In the early days, theirs was a close-knit family of four, although Antony has since drifted from his sister Mandy who now lives in Israel. But his relationship with his parents remained strong and, when he talks of them, his voice is resonant with respect and longing.*

*Joe and Selma Egnal were a Jewish couple living in Johannesburg. A few months after their wedding, Selma was rushed to hospital with severe stomach pains – the result of a near-fatal ectopic pregnancy. Selma's life was saved, but both of her fallopian tubes were removed. She would never be able to bear children.*

*Joe and Selma adopted Antony soon after his birth. The placement was successful and Antony grew up a well-adjusted, happy child who was entirely comfortable with his adoption. In fact, unless prompted, he never refers to it and always regarded it as a non-issue – "The same way a redhead knows they have red hair, I always knew that I was adopted." His home was loving and warm, catering for all his emotional needs, and he never felt compelled to question his origins. His family was the only one he had ever known, and the only one he ever needed.*

*Family has always been the central tenet around which Antony has built his life. Even his professional career is focused on family and he specifically chose to further his medical studies in America which offered a unique specialty in family medicine. His medical practice*

*is founded on relationships and he prides himself on being the type of doctor who can attend to all members of the family unit, from paediatric to geriatric.*

*Despite his happy childhood, or perhaps because of it, I imagine that he's always wanted to have a big family. I can picture him sitting in a Bellevue park just up the road from his house, staring longingly at a family of six who have settled down nearby. Mom spreads the blanket and unpacks the picnic hamper, lining up the favourite drinks and candy bars. Dad reads the Seattle Times while the kids toss a frisbee in a loose square. And Antony watches discreetly, wondering what it must be like to be part of a brood; to have enough people around so that you are never alone...*

Antony:

Yael was three years old when we started trying for another child, which René and I both desperately wanted. Ren got pregnant a few more times, but each time ended in miscarriage. We also went through one or two more cycles of infertility treatment which failed.

By the time Yael was four and a half, we realised that we would not be able to have another child naturally, even with the wonders of infertility treatment. So we started contemplating adoption. Personally, I had had a wonderful experience as an adopted child so the decision was not a difficult one for me. But it was harder for René. She was more reluctant at first, so we went to adoption meetings and talked to other parents who had adopted children. We discussed the technicalities and the emotions, coming to understand how they regarded their adopted children as their very own. Their personal experience helped our decision and we finally agreed that this was something we really wanted to pursue.

The adoption process turned out to be a greater emotional rollercoaster than the infertility process. Talking to other people in adoption circles, we realised that there was a significant difference between the two. When you decide to adopt a child, it's not a case of *if* you will have the child as it is with infertility treatment. It's a matter of *when* the child will arrive – particularly in this country and if you have the financial resources. Ultimately, if you look hard enough, you will find the right child.

The initial process involved a lot of fact-gathering, photograph-taking and testimonial composition. We had to secure an adoption attorney as well as go through a pretty rigorous health study with a social worker. We then put the word out, both locally through word of mouth with friends, as well as by sending letters to my colleagues. We also signed up for a few adoption websites which at the time were fairly new, but being someone who believed in the technological age, I felt strongly that we should pursue that route. Through it, we actually did get many contacts during the eighteen months of our search. We were fairly broad in our requests with regard to racial background of the child, but felt the closest link to Caucasian, Hispanic and Asian cultures. We were not necessarily looking for a completely open adoption – which allows for ongoing association between the birth parents, adoptees, and the adoptive parents – but René and I both wanted to at least meet the birth-mother of any child we decided to adopt. I'm not sure how much of this was rooted in me being adopted or how much of it was a desire as a physician to physically lay eyes on the mother of any child that we would be taking care of for the rest of our lives.

I don't think that we were prepared for the emotional difficulties of the 'dating' or 'getting to know' process with a woman who might consider us for parents. There were many chinks in the road. The fact that we were Jewish, the fact that we were not American, the fact that we had another child...all of these were stumbling blocks for many prospective birth-mothers.

Soon after our website entry went live, we were contacted by a birth-mother in Oregon. I communicated with her for a few weeks and then René and I drove four hours to meet her. This was our first physical contact with a prospective birth-mother.

Although the meeting went well, there were some things that René was just not comfortable with. Whether it was the situation itself or the fact that she wasn't ready to move forward with the whole process, I'm not sure. It was one of the most difficult things in my life, having to call the birth-mother back and tell her that we were not going to adopt her child. Here was a woman with a beautiful healthy baby who was offering her child to us, yet we were turning the opportunity down...

From that point we went for another whole year, stumbling along, meeting and losing prospective birth-mothers. It became so difficult that we almost selected not to pursue the



process, especially after meeting a Jewish couple out of California who were running what we thought was a legitimate adoption agency. After paying them a few thousand dollars and meeting them two weeks later, it became clear that they were a fly-by-night organisation and were far from honest.

In February 2001 we took a vacation to Cabo San Lucas, on the Baja Peninsula in Mexico. I still checked my email regularly, and a couple of days after arriving, we got a message from an adoption agency in Dallas, Texas. They were representing a mom who was due in March; she had seen our website and wanted to meet us. Initially we thought it was another hoax, but by the time we received the second email, it was clear that this birth-mother was serious. We had also learnt that the closer to the due-date you make contact with the birth-mother, the greater the likelihood of success.

There were phone calls back and forth and we decided to move forward the trip to Dallas to meet this woman. We were guarded and, ironically, at the time we had six other contacts going on. Trying to juggle all these balls was emotionally draining. In fact, one of the other birth-mothers was also in Texas and we contemplated meeting both, but ultimately decided against that and flew to Dallas just to meet the one.

The encounter took place in the offices of the adoption agency. A small lunch was prepared but we could hardly eat we were so nervous. We tried to remember the best wisdom we had received from parents who adopted children. 'You know the situation is right when you feel completely at ease and comfortable with the birth-mother.' 'You don't find your child, your child finds you...'

We had a one-hour meeting with Leilani – a delightful 22-year old lady who was putting herself through paralegal school. When her boyfriend at the time found out she was pregnant, he left her and she had to fend for herself. Her mother lived in another part of the state and was not in a financial position to help her at all. Giving her son up for adoption was the only way that she could provide for her child.

We spent an hour with Leilani and then left for home.

The thing that struck both Ren and I, right from the word go, was that Leilani was a warm, loving individual who genuinely wanted the best for her child. Being part-Philippino and part-Caucasian, she was strikingly beautiful, with long black hair pulled back into a bun, dressed in a simple maternity dress. Throughout the session she had clasped both her hands around her tummy, with such a strong display of maternal instinct – we could sense her connection with the child she was carrying. That was an important sign for us.

We left Texas filled with hope that our search had come to an end, although of course we were well aware that it was the birth-mother's prerogative to choose the adoptive parents. She could change her mind at any point in time.

Shortly after arriving back in Seattle, there was a phone-call from the adoption agency to say that Leilani wanted us to raise her son. We allowed ourselves to feel cautiously optimistic. All we had to do now was wait for the phone call when she went into labour. Leilani had agreed to have us present at the birth if possible...

Six long weeks passed.

Waiting is the worst. Adoption laws vary all over the country but until you have the child in your arms, in your own home, you can't really relax. Even then, you do hear horror stories about people getting a child and then having it taken away...So it's difficult to stay objective and business-like about it. Of course the support groups are fantastic and it's essential to have contact with others who have gone through the same process. But even doing your research can be overwhelming – the laws and details are not uncomplicated! It's easy to become paranoid that things won't go your way. So the waiting can take it out of you...

But then, one Friday evening in March 2001, we were at home for Shabbat dinner. We had had friends over and Ren and I joked that they were a good set of guests as they had left early enough for us to clean up and watch Barbara Walters on TV. We put Yael to sleep and had just gotten into bed when the phone rang. It was ten o'clock.

"Hello Antony?" said a female voice.

"Yes, this is Antony."

"I'm phoning to tell you to pack your bags."

It was the social worker from Dallas. Leilani was in strong labour and the social worker was en route to the hospital to meet her.

I get tears in my eyes when I think of it. I recall René sitting on the bed, paralysed, while I ran around the bedroom, not quite knowing what to do next. When I finally realised this was it, I called the airlines and booked us on the first flight out of Seattle in the morning. We threw some stuff into a bag and tried to get some sleep. But it was impossible.

We agreed that it would be appropriate for Yael to accompany us. We wanted her to be part of the whole process. So we woke her up at four o'clock the next morning and caught the six o'clock flight to Dallas.

Marc Seth Egnal was born on the 31<sup>st</sup> of March 2001. Yael, René and I arrived in Dallas just after lunch and drove straight to the hospital. We were warned by other adoptive parents that the child you are about to adopt is not legally yours until the mother has signed her rights away. It varies from state to state, but in Texas – which is a favourable adoption state – this period was 48 hours from birth. We were also warned not to pay too much attention to the child without paying any attention to the birth-mother as sometimes this alienates her and, in the past, had caused the birth-mother to change her mind at the last minute.

We both felt anxious as we were shown into Leilani's room, but were obviously pleased to see her and felt such warmth and respect for her. Marc had weighed six pounds, thirteen ounces – something which struck me immediately because it equals the amount of commandments in the Jewish Torah – 613. It was an instinctive connection which helped bond us with the child.

After holding him for a while, Leilani passed him to Ren. He had just pooped in his diaper and I jokingly said to Ren: "Since you are going to change many more of those, you may as well change this one." Ren was nervous as it had been a while since she had changed a poopy diaper, so she handed Marc to me to do the honours. I have many kids in my practice and I get to do this on a regular basis, so she felt I was more adept to do the first change.

Marc spent the next 48 hours in the hospital and we visited each day. Leilani told us things about Marc that only a birth-mother would know and it was overwhelmingly apparent that

she truly loved her child. In what we believe is the most unselfish act of human kindness, she gave up her own flesh and blood to another couple who could not have a child of their own, because she wanted a better life for him.

Two days later, the documentation was signed.

It was a strange setting and experience, being in a hospital room with René, Leilani, Marc, Yael and the adoption social worker. Yaeli was sitting on the floor, playing with her dolls. The five-page legal document was handed over to the birth-mother. I had to read out the entire statement of Texas law which basically detailed Leilani's inability to provide for the child and the fact that she voluntarily relinquished her rights to Marc, completely and utterly.

René had tried to give the baby to Leilani to hold but she insisted that René keep him. I will never forget that scene: the crowded room, René holding Marc, tears streaming down her face...Leilani was also crying, a mixture of happy and sad tears, as she read the document. Yaeli quietly packed up her dolls and left the room to sit in the hallway.

Leilani was soon discharged from hospital and we got to bring Marky back to the hotel. By law, we had to remain in town for a week, until the interstate adoption transfer paperwork was complete. Marky's first night was spent on the floor in the cupboard with the doors open! We were too concerned about having him on the floor next to the bed where someone might trample him in the night.

We spent a few days hanging around Dallas until we got clearance to leave and take our son home.

We had waited a long time for our first child, and Marc's entry into our family was no less auspicious. For René and I, there had been a sense of incompleteness after a few years of having Yael around. Although we both believed we could raise a well-balanced single child, we knew we had it in us to raise at least two kids. Ultimately, when Marc got older, there was no hesitation in giving away the bouncy seat or the high chair. We realised that we had filled our quota and were now a complete family.

Of course there was an adjustment to having a baby in the house again! It had been six years since Yael was an infant. René generally does not do well without her sleep and since she was not breastfeeding, I was able to give Marc his night-time feeds. All those years of medical training had prepared me for sleepless nights.

Of course we had to put Marc through a conversion process to become Jewish. After a few weeks, he was dipped in the local *Mikveh* and we planned a huge party for the *Bris Milah* circumcision ritual. Although I had performed many circumcisions as a doctor, the *Mohel* convinced me to play Dad that day and leave the snipping to him! It's different when it's your own child.

Preparing for the *Bris*, it struck me: where once I had been adopted myself, now I was adopting a son.



Yael and Marc

## THE CALL

**S**he sets the dinner table, using the casual tableware for Sunday night. Her husband has fallen asleep on the couch and she can hear a low grumble starting in his open mouth. She should wake him before it becomes a full-throated snore.

She knows she should distract herself. For the past hour she's been trying to read her dog-eared Mills & Boon favourite, but even the familiar words are no comfort. So she prepares a light supper and calls her husband to join her. She doesn't feel like eating.

Lynette Langman hears the telephone ringing from the entrance hall; the sound of the fog-horn has almost drowned it out. She jumps up to answer, straightening the old Persian rug along the way. She unclips the pearly bauble from her ear and picks up the receiver, heart stopping for just a beat in well-practised anticipation.

A few months ago, Lynette hardly dared to dream about taking this call. She had no reason to be hopeful. But now she's a mother, a grandmother, with a large, established family, about to change their lives forever...



Lynette

### A MOTHER, A FATHER AND THREE SIBLINGS

**L**ynette Langman is 60 years old and a working woman. Although she's done paralegal work for years, she is now the director of a Cape Town synagogue and her afternoons are free after 4pm. It is usually early evening when I interview her. We meet at her home – a comfortable ocean-facing apartment, which darkens slowly as the sun slides below the waves.

She is always ready for her interviews. She greets me in that calm, I-could-have-been-here-all-day manner of hers which is unflinching, no matter how frenetic work might have been. In fact, 'frenetic' is not a word I would associate with Lynette. She has a lukewarm mildness about her that is instantly soothing, and what strikes me is not a confidence so much as a constancy. She does not rattle easily.

*For our meetings at her apartment, she sets up space at her dining room table, slotting me into the trim order of her home with its soft floral couches, oil landscapes of fishing villages and mountain streams, small porcelain dancer poised en pointe, and a multitude of family photos precisely positioned on faded cotton doilies. It is old-fashioned, yet familiar. I feel as if I'm in my grandparents' flat, which is interesting because Lynette is my grandparents' niece. Her father and my grandfather were brothers, and the family resemblance extends to the home, right down to the same Eastern European sense of neatness that I remember from my own grandmother's unfailing need to straighten.*

*I take a seat and look down. My reflection looks back at me from polished mahogany. Lynette sits opposite me. Her coiffed copper hair settles into place, its chunky blonde highlights almost at odds with the conservativeness of her home. She is perfectly groomed; even the gap between her two front teeth appears purposefully placed. Her pencilled eyebrows are slightly raised in anticipation and I notice that her makeup has been freshly applied. I am a guest, not yet a confidante.*

*She smooths her blouse and rests all ten manicured fingers squarely in front of her, as if preparing to open up and bare all.*

Lynette:

I was only 18 years old when I gave up my baby David. Adoption was my only choice. And my biggest secret. We told no-one about David; no-one other than the five or six people directly involved. And over 40 years, no-one in that tight, secret circle breathed a word about David. The world never knew I had him, and the world never knew I lost him, not even my children...

Since that time all those years ago, not a week has gone by that I have not thought about him.

But I knew this particular day would eventually come. I always had a feeling...

It was the middle of the afternoon and I was dealing with some admin work when the phone rang. I picked it up, half-distracted.



A woman asked, "Is that Mrs Langman?" She pronounced it in the Afrikaans way – 'Lungmun'.

"Yes," I said. "This is Mrs LANGman. How can I help?"

"Were you Lynette Zinn?"

"Yes I was. May I ask who's speaking?"

She told me that her name was Eileen and she was a social worker for the Adoption Centre. She wanted to speak to me about a young man called David Zinn.

"Eileen, I know exactly what you are talking about. But please hold on for a moment – I want to close my door."

I held my breath while I checked to see that no-one was standing outside. I felt my face flush and had to force my mouth not to break into a huge smile. Not yet, not just yet. I rushed back to the phone, almost knocking over the photo of my parents on the way. I stumbled and sat down heavily in my chair.

"I'm sorry, please continue."

According to her records, I was the birth mother of David Zinn who was given up for adoption many years ago. David was now called Antony Egnal, and he wanted to make contact with me. She needed to know if I was agreeable to the idea.

She only had a little bit of information about him. She knew he was a physician, living in America, and that he appeared to be just fine.

"I'm sure this must have come as a great shock," said Eileen. "I'll give you some time to think about it."

But I didn't need time. I knew I wanted to make contact with him – I'd been waiting for this day for 40 years! I told Eileen that I married David's father and that we had three other children who didn't know about David. Out of respect to my husband Max, I would wait to discuss this with him before giving Eileen the go-ahead to set up the contact. But I knew what Max's response would be.

She gave me her telephone numbers at work and at home. "You can call me at any time," she insisted, before saying goodbye.

As soon as I put down the phone, I opened my door to make sure no-one had been listening outside in the hallway. Then I carried on as normal...well, as normally as I could. I packed up early and drove home.

We were living in a flat in Bantry Bay, where we had moved after all the kids left home. I remember on that day, when I got home and opened all the windows, the sea was so loud it almost drowned out my thoughts. I went straight to the kitchen and started preparing supper, even though it was only three or four in the afternoon. I had to keep myself busy until Max came home.

When I heard his key in the lock, I didn't know how to contain myself. He walked into the kitchen to greet me. I must have looked dazed or something because he immediately asked, "What's wrong?"

"Max," I said. "The call that I have spoken to you about for so many years came today." I watched his expression. He looked much as I imagine I did – slightly dazed. "It appears our long-lost son is a physician in America. He is called Antony Egnal. He contacted a social worker who wants to know if we want to communicate with him."

Max's eyes grew to the size of saucers. He took a deep breath and said, "Wow! How do we go about this?" You see for him, there was no hesitation either.

I dialled the social worker immediately and arranged to see her.

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*Eileen Jordaan works at the Child Welfare Society in Cape Town. I call her and she agrees to meet me as soon as she can locate the records of the case.*

*The Child Welfare Society sits behind the Magistrate's Court in Wynberg, a bland part of Cape Town where even the mountain views are seen from an unfortunate angle. I make my way behind the court, searching for a parking space amongst the white police vans and Toyota Corollas.*

*On the corner, a faded administrative building is marked 'Child Welfare Society' in crudely painted letters with a big smiling sun. The walls are smudged with rust and the gutters are clogged with stale leaves and discarded chip packets. I walk through an old*

*courtyard, following a paradoxically modern sign to 'Reception.' Inside, I am disappointed that the place doesn't brim with bean-bags and candy floss. Instead, I sink into a musty old couch to wait, and page through a two year-old People magazine. Above my head, a faded pink and white poster advises women to have a pap smear at their local clinic. Beside it, another poster explains 'pap smear.' And I marvel at how exteriors mislead, because the peeling walls and crusty floors say nothing of this organisation's remarkable work with vulnerable children.*

*Eileen has a maternal warmth, while at the same time remaining the consummate professional. She ushers me into her office through "this awful maze" and invites me to "pick the best of the worst" of two mismatched, splintered chairs. She is already prepared for me, having reviewed the Zinn/Langman file which lies open on a desk cluttered with paperwork. There is also a copy of the book that she has co-authored: 'A Road Called Adoption'. Dressed plainly with a simple hairstyle, her shining eyes crinkle as she talks. Her accent is mostly English, with a touch of Afrikaans and a smudge of something else undefined – an accent which crosses boundaries in a country fraught with them.*

Eileen:

I am a qualified social worker and I've worked with Child Welfare for many years, although I'm now in private practice. Since 1980, I've worked mostly with adoption cases and I supervised the adoption team. I've dealt with both sides of the adoption story: parents who come here wanting to adopt a child – usually childless couples – whom I have to screen for suitability; and parents who want to give up a child for an adoption placement. I take care of supervision afterwards and I do court work since adoption is a legal process. From 1994 until my retirement, I was the Adoption Manager and the Foster Care Manager. I also deal with adopted people who are trying to trace their biological parents.

South Africa has a fairly progressive adoption history, if you compare it to other places in the world. For instance, our first adoption law was passed in 1923 while Britain's first was passed a few years later, around 1926. At the time of the Zinn adoption in 1961, according to The Children's Act, all adoption records were closed which means that there was no access for either party to identifying information about each other. Adoptive parents would have some

basic information, such as the biological parents' surnames, ages and professions, but that was all.

In 1987, the Child Care Act came in, and it became possible for an adopted person to apply for biological parents' background information and identifying information, and to ask for a reunion. Then in 1996, the law changed to make it possible for a birth parent to initiate inquiry, with certain conditions: the child had to be over 21 years of age; and the adoptive parents had to give their consent. So now there are two types of adoption: 'non-disclosed adoption' where birth parents give their consent for the child's adoption by persons unknown to them; and 'disclosed adoption' where all parties know each other.

It's unusual to find a case of totally open adoption here. What's more common is that there is some contact between the parties over the years, mediated by the social worker. But things have changed a lot. In the early years, babies up for adoption were snatched away from their birth mothers and sometimes a blanket was even put up between the mother and the baby to ensure that she wouldn't see it. These days, at least since 1980, the mother has the opportunity to see and hold the baby. She is also given three profiles of adoptive parents (without any identifying information) so that she can choose one for her child.

At the Child Welfare Society, we handle about 75 adoptions a year, although this is decreasing gradually. Of course issues differ across the race groups in this country, but these days, white babies up for adoption are few and far between. Even in Lynette's day, a white Jewish baby was not a common thing. I have here the records that the original social worker drew up when Lynette had her baby...

*She shows me a set of faded notes, written up in a neat cursive hand, dated '14.8.61':*

*'...Visited Lynette Zinn and new baby at Booth. I was lucky in meeting both mother and father together and was able to talk very freely to both. There is not sufficient money for them to marry at present (they say)...They intend announcing their engagement in November and marrying next year. There seemed to be no apparent distress at giving up their first child...'*

– “This is usual,” says Eileen. “You typically see a numbness in biological parents around the time of the birth of the child. That is probably what is being reflected here in the mention of ‘no apparent distress.’”

‘...Her parents know. His parents may know (?) I impressed on both of them that if they decided now, there must be no retraction. Told them what possibilities there are of keeping the baby in foster care and expense entailed if they wished to keep him...

– “Social workers never just accept adoption,” says Eileen. “We usually examine all other options available as well...”

‘...Told them they might not ever have another one. Because you never know. But nothing deterred them...

The report continues with a physical description of Lynette and details of her education and work experience. It then goes on to do the same for Max, exercising somewhat more of a value judgement on his character and personality.

‘...The father is very Jewish in appearance – black hair, good features, clear fair skin. Rather short but declares that he is 5 ft 7. He is studying accountancy at UCT and articled to a firm. He hopes to get out of accountancy to better things. Says he earns £70 p.m. (I wonder!)...Obviously inquisitive – watched every ‘t’ crossed and every ‘i’ dotted on the record sheet...Has a definite quality of cleverness about him...He seemed at one on the arrangements with Lynette...’

Eileen smiles at some of the descriptions, pointing out that it’s important for the social worker to note any impressions or assessments in order to paint the fullest picture. She then pages through the file to her own notes and continues.

Eileen:

I remember my first conversation with David, now Antony, although it was actually his sister-in-law who phoned the agency first, in June 2001. Antony was living in America so it was easier for her to liaise on his behalf at times. She gave me the details that Antony had already managed to obtain, probably from the Johannesburg Welfare Society as he had grown up in Johannesburg. Since the records were now open to children seeking their biological parents, he had obtained his biological mother’s maiden surname; her age at the time of giving birth;

her religion; and the circumstances surrounding the adoption. There were similar details for the biological father too. This would have been the same type of information passed on to the adoptive parents, Joe and Selma Egnal, all those years ago. Surnames only, though. No first names...So I started trying to trace the biological mother. Now bear in mind that this can be a very lengthy process. I've had cases where it has taken me two years to find the mother and the waiting can be terribly difficult for the adopted child. But this one fell into place with remarkable speed and ease...

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*Lynette straightens her posture as she remembers, trying hard to distinguish real memory from confabulation. She tells me that the social worker located her by starting with the most solid information she had: the surnames. Playing detective, Eileen identified 16 Zinns and two M. Langmans in the phone-book. None of the Zinns were listed at Ethel Road, Claremont – the address supplied on the original adoption records. Since the search, if possible, almost always starts with the biological mother, Eileen simply chose the very first 'Zinn' in the phone book and called the number. The woman who answered confirmed that she knew a Lynette Zinn but only had the telephone number of Lynette's mother – Tilly Zinn. The woman asked if everything was all right and Eileen responded that she had some important information about an old friend of Lynette's. Satisfied, the woman provided her with a telephone number. That woman was my grandmother...*

*Eileen called Lynette's mother, Tilly, and a nurse answered. The nurse gave some information on Lynette, saying that she was indeed married and living in Bantry Bay, but she was unsure of Lynette's married surname. Working on a hunch, and on the hope that perhaps the teenage couple's intentions to marry had indeed materialised, Eileen called the M. Langman in Bantry Bay, as listed in the phone-book. A maid answered and gave her Lynette's work and cellular phone numbers. In under an hour, she had found her match.*

Lynette:

Max and I could talk about nothing else for the two days leading up to our appointment with Eileen. Why had David...no, Antony...decided to contact us? What were we going to say to him? How would we explain ourselves? I was so worried about having to answer the question 'why?' and being judged. How could I make him understand how it was back then?

On the day of our appointment, I left work early to go to the 'dentist'. Max fetched me from the office. It was raining. Eileen's offices were in an old colonial house with a huge entrance hall and a wide, dark staircase which we climbed to meet her. We sat down on a couch to wait. My mouth was dry. I could actually feel my pulse throbbing in my throat. The door opened and she walked over to welcome us. She had real warmth about her and I felt instantly at ease.

Once inside, she began to question us in great detail. Who knew about David? Were we sure that we wanted to open this door, that we realised the implications? How did we feel our children would react when they found out they had a brother of 40 years? Did I realise how painful this process could be? She told us that this was a unique case. "Seldom do we find the biological mother and father still together. It's going to come as a shock to David that he has brothers and sisters."

We assured her that we were well aware of the implications and would have no problem with our kids. We just wanted to get started!

"Because of the time change, it's quite difficult to contact him," she said. "If I don't manage to get him on the phone, I will fax him and tell him that you are willing to connect. How would you prefer him to contact you? By email, fax or phone?"

"Definitely by phone."

Two days passed and I had heard nothing. Three days, and still nothing. Four, five, six days and I thought I was going to cry.

I had still told no-one about what was happening and the pressure was mounting. Each night I'd wonder why I hadn't heard anything.

"Maybe he's changed his mind," said Max, confirming my worst fears. "I mean, it's not just a mother now -- it's a father and three siblings. Maybe it's all too much."

"But I've waited for so long!" I'd say. For the first time, he was real. I didn't want to hear that he'd changed his mind.

After the sixth day, I phoned Eileen at home one night, but she still hadn't heard from him.

Eileen:

When I first contacted Lynette, her words to me were something like: "I have been dreading this day. I knew it would come and I know what I have to do." [*I interject, questioning the word 'dreading' which seemed quite the opposite to Lynette's telling.*] 'Dreading' and 'looking forward to' can be one and the same thing sometimes, you know. There are so many mixed emotions which come with a time like this. So many questions that a birth mother starts to ask, like "Can my child ever forgive me?" or 'Is my child angry?' There is often tremendous guilt which overshadows the ecstasy of having found a long-lost child. That's quite common.

But what is very *uncommon* about this case is the fact that the biological parents married. What's more, they remained happily married and had three more children. So Antony found an entire blood-family intact. That's very unusual. And it can bring with it its own set of complications for the adopted child who may feel even an even greater sense of exclusion and abandonment. But Antony didn't seem shaken by the knowledge that he had three siblings. I suggested that he consult with a social worker or psychologist in Seattle to discuss this process, but he seemed fine and told me about his reasons for wanting to contact his biological mother. He seemed very together.

Lynette called me on several occasions during the time she was waiting for Antony to make contact. The waiting is incredibly difficult. Both sides have their taste of it: the adopted child who waits while we trace the mother, and the mother who waits for the adopted child to make contact. Lynette needed someone to talk to while she waited. Because that is the time that the feelings of guilt and pain start to re-emerge strongly. The pain is always there, over the years, but now it becomes sharp again. Also, she couldn't really talk to anyone else about this because she had decided not to tell the siblings just yet. She obviously wanted to get an idea of what sort of person Antony was before she broke the news.

To me, he seemed like a lovely chap. His adoptive mother, Selma Egnal, had sent the Adoption Centre letters and photographs over the years, saying how lucky they felt to have



him. In one letter, she described a family holiday to the beach and concluded by saying, "I don't understand why couples would choose to go on holiday without their children. It's the most wonderful thing in the world." Antony certainly seemed to have had a happy upbringing and now, as an adult living in America, came across as very warm and self-assured on the telephone. But Lynette would have to experience that for herself...

Lynette:

At work, I was a write-off. I couldn't concentrate on anything and was consumed by thoughts of David. I made careless mistakes and didn't feel like socialising during lunch-time. I made excuses and buried myself in my office, lost in my thoughts about David Zinn, Antony Egnal...

*I can imagine her trying to find a trace of familiarity. Egnal. Egnal. She writes his name out a hundred times, looking at it from every angle to see if she recognises it, recognises any hint of David in it. Egnal. Egnal. Something is sticking, but she isn't sure what. She looks through her pocketbook to see if she has any Egnals listed. But of course she doesn't. She doodles his name on the paper again. Egnal. E. G. N. A. L. She holds the paper at arm's length, looking at each letter in turn. And that's when she discovers: Egnal, spelt backwards, forms the first letters of her own surname, Langman.*

Lynette:

About a week later, I got a call from Eileen to say that Antony would phone me over the coming weekend.

I stayed home all of Saturday, waiting by the phone. I imagined that he would call at night, given the time difference with America, but I couldn't be sure so I refused to go out. Saturday night came and went with nothing. On Sunday afternoon, Max convinced me to go to my nephew for tea. Just for an hour. I rushed home at six o'clock to check the answering machine. Nothing. At seven o'clock we sat down to have dinner. Scrambled eggs on toast. And the phone rang. Max looked at me and said: "That's your son. You'd better go answer it."

It's hard to capture the significance of this moment. I mean, how best to tell it? I feel like there should be a drum roll or something. It really was the moment I'd been waiting 40 long years for. 40 years...that's like *[scribbles something down]*...14 600 days – more if you take leap years into account. That's half a lifetime. And a lot of tears...

So how best to tell it? I suppose I should just tell it like it was...29 July 2001, the middle of a freezing cold Cape winter...

"Hello?" I said. My voice wasn't my voice.

There was a delay. And then, "Is...is that Lynette? This is Antony."

Tears welled up. I had to breathe through my nose. "G-d, Dav-...Antony. I have waited 40 years to hear your voice. You don't know how wonderful this is."

"I do know. And at the outset, I want to thank you for what you did for me. I had the most wonderful childhood. And I know that it couldn't have been easy for you..."

"Antony, things were so different then. I didn't have a choice. I've thought of you so often and wondered where you were and how you were..."

"I believe I've got siblings," he said.

"Yes. You have a brother, Colin, in Cape Town. A sister, Lara, in Los Angeles. And a younger brother, Jonathan, in London. They don't know about you. No-one does. I'm going to need time to deal with all this."

"I know. I understand."

Where did he get such compassion and understanding? Why did I feel like it was *him* comforting *me* when it really should have been the other way round?

I started asking questions. Was he married? Did he have children? We spoke for at least half an hour. Then I said, "I'm being selfish. I'm sure Max wants to speak to you too."

I called my husband. But Max is not a telephone person and I could hear that he was uncomfortable. He didn't know what to say! For him, this was a stranger. For me, it was my son...

Eileen:

It's not entirely unusual that adoptees have a feeling of gratitude to their birth parents. I've seen that before. But it is most unusual for male adoptees to have those feelings. In my experience, men are more prone to the common feelings of anger and resentment – not always, but mostly. Antony's response is certainly remarkable.

The adoptee grows up knowing they are different. I always advise adoptive parents to talk to their child at an early age about adoption – starting as young as two or three years old, so that it doesn't come as a shock later on. But it's still difficult for a child to feel different. It's difficult to go to a doctor's office and not know how to fill in the section under 'family medical history' – and the medical histories taken in the early adoptions were very skimpy.

Adoptees have questions like, 'Why did my mother reject me? Didn't she love me?' They often develop low self-esteem as a result of feeling different or unwanted. But if there is a strong bond with the adoptive parents, like Antony appears to have had, then adoptees are less inclined to have feelings of rejection or anger. They do have split loyalties then, though. When they find their biological mother, they often grapple with their sense of allegiance to the various parents.

It's important for me to understand the expectations of both parties. Is the adoptee looking to replace a mother? Is he or she seeking financial support? Or is he or she simply curious about their family background? From the birth mother's side, has she had any other children? Is she likely to become possessive about this long-lost child? It's imperative that I come to understand these expectations and prepare both parties for what can come.

I would say that it is sometimes even more difficult for birth parents who were forced through circumstance to give up a child, then married each other and had other children. There is enormous pain and guilt. They look at their children and think, 'Somewhere, out there, is a full-blood sibling...'



Selma and Joe

## THE WAY A REDHEAD KNOWS THEY HAVE RED HAIR

**A**ntony Egnal never knew another name. He learned to walk on the chequered tiles of a Yeoville flat on the edge of downtown Johannesburg. His first smells were of the nearby pizzeria's folded calzones, oozing mozzarella and crushed tomato. His first sights were the Rocky Street hippies, smoking dreamily outside the record stores. His first sounds were the voices of his adoptive parents.

*His world was small: mommy, daddy, sister Mandy, and Kit the neighbour's cat. His world was apple Purity and candy floss; Peter Rabbit and Dr Seuss. He got a dummy at night-time, dipped in sweet gripe water if he cried. But he hardly did. He was safe – though he knew Where the Wild Things Are. He was happy – especially when his father brought home his favourite marshmallow fish as a treat. He was loved.*

Antony:

Ours was a content, simple existence. My parents, Selma and Joe, were very much home-bodies and did not go out a lot or travel. I spent the first three years of my life in the flat in Yeoville, but we later moved to a single storey ranch-style house in Northcliff. We lived there for many years and my earliest memories revolve around happy times spent in our neighbourhood.

I was a lucky child. I had parents who were very loving – to each other and to us. I only ever heard them argue twice.

My mother, Selma, was an attractive woman in her day and as the years went on, she became...well nourished! I remember her constantly trying to diet, especially when there was a significant family function that she wanted to look good for. She had blue eyes and fair hair, with a gap between her front teeth. In fact, I also have one! She had distinctive hands, with long, strong fingernails which she kept neatly groomed. She was house-proud and particular about the way her children dressed – we always had to be neat and clean. She was devoted as a mother.

She used to work in the mornings, helping out at my Dad's pharmacy, but she was always home when we got back from school. Then she would *schlep* us around to all our friends or extra-curricular activities. People used to joke that her annual pilgrimage was shul-hopping on the Jewish high holidays – Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. In Northcliff, there was definitely a scarcity of Jewish talent – at Northcliff High School, there were only thirteen Jews out of a total of twelve hundred pupils! So in my mother's attempt to ensure that I would mix with and date nice Jewish girls, she would *schlep* us to the Jewish side of Johannesburg on the holidays, going from shul to shul to see if we could spy any talent.

My mother was the more outgoing of my parents. Even though I don't believe she finished high school, she was wise in other ways. When I was growing up, she was always regarded as the 'cool' mom to whom all my friends would turn in times of trouble. She was a legend in her day on the sidelines of the high school rugby field. She died not knowing the first thing about the game of rugby, but she was determined to encourage and support me. When I made the senior rugby team, she became a well-known feature, running up and down the sidelines,

making sure that nobody was hurting her boy and crying 'FOUL!' anytime someone tackled me!

My parents never restricted my movements or pressurised me, but I always strove to meet their expectations. I never wanted to let them down...

Joe was an introvert. He was a slender man, the same height as my mom, and I towered above both of them by the time I reached my full height. He was a brilliant student throughout school but in his early 20s he developed severe depression, which altered his professional career, and he became a pharmacist instead of the physician that he always wanted to be. He was often around, but in the background. My mother played the lead role.

My father worked hard and set up a successful, independent pharmacy in the coloured area Coronationville. He loved classical music and was an avid chess player. He was also a good bridge player and in fact taught bridge for years and won many competitions.

He did take a lot of interest in my life and was very supportive, but he didn't fully understand childhood or my teenage years. He was on a different planet! I mean, one of the most embarrassing moments of my life was the night of my high school dance. He arrived there to fetch me and when he couldn't find me, he told a student standing outside to go look for me. The student couldn't find me on the large dance floor so my dad went up to the DJ and got him to announce: "Antony Egnal, your daddy is waiting for you outside!"

I enjoyed my school years, and I excelled. I was a prefect in Standard Five at Northcliff Primary and I was made Vice Head-Boy in my matric year at Northcliff High School. Being slightly overweight as a kid, I wasn't the greatest sportsman but I swam and played soccer in primary school. Then when I hit puberty I suddenly came into my own and I excelled at rugby too.

Judaism played an interesting role in our family. We were a traditionally orthodox home, but my father's upbringing as a child was much less orthodox. In fact, the only time I ever heard my parents argue was over religion.

My father was a bright man, even brilliant. His IQ was probably in excess of 150 and he was a great thinker. In his young married life, he questioned the very existence of God and religion. He read tons of books, including the Koran, Old Testament, and New Testament, and in the end, he decided that it was all the same BS.

He did believe in a 'superpower' though, and he was proud to be Jewish. But he took no part in Jewish ritual life. He only went to shul on my barmitzvah, the occasional family wedding, and Yom Kippur. But he worked hard to instil a Jewish upbringing in his children. Even though my mother was more traditional, she refused to send me to a Jewish day school. She said there were more than enough public schools which were right up the road and just as good.

One of the Jewish values that I've really appreciated is the emphasis on family life. The four of us spent a lot of time together, going with my dad to the pharmacy on weekends, taking local vacations, hanging out around the pool. Yes, we enjoyed our time together and I was always close to my parents. So it was just never an issue, the fact that I was adopted...

It must have been difficult for my parents to realise they couldn't have kids of their own after my mother's tubal pregnancy. But at the same time, my father had had bouts of severe depression and, when I was older and wiser, I remember my father saying that it was probably better that they had not had biological children as they would not have wanted to pass on a depressive gene. It was just like him to rationalise in that way.

I've always known that I was adopted. I don't remember being told about it or having a special conversation. I've just always known.

Growing up in my family, having loving parents who communicated openly, it was never an issue. I imagine that they must have spoken to me about it at some point in my childhood, but it didn't have a huge impact on me, or at least not one that I remember.

My younger sister Mandy was also adopted. Funnily enough, Mandy and I looked alike, but besides that, I don't think you could have found two people more dissimilar. She was born with a congenital dislocation of her hip and spent the first nine months of her life in a body cast. We played together fairly well in our earlier years, but we grew further and further apart

as we got older. She was diagnosed with Attention Deficit Disorder at a fairly young age and although my parents attempted to get her help, I'm not sure if enough was known about the condition back in the '70s. As the years progressed, things with Mandy became more strained. She began to mix with the wrong crowd. I can remember the days when some guy would pull up to our house on a motorbike, knock on the front door and say, "I've come to pick up Mandy for a date." And I would politely say, "No, you're not," and slam the door in his face. That didn't help matters. But we were never close and she now lives in Israel. We do keep in contact, but...

It might have been different for Mandy but to me, my adoption was a non-issue. I recently read a book about the author's search for his biological mother. Part of the book describes his nightmares and deep yearning to seek her out. But I never felt that. I was content with my wonderful relationship with my adoptive parents, and I wasn't interested in looking further. Even when the records were unsealed in South Africa and one was able to get information on one's biological parents and the adoption process, I had no desire or interest. I never had the angry backlash that my sister had towards our adoptive parents. During their many altercations, she would shout that they were not her real parents and they should leave her alone. But that was not how I felt about them; to me, they may as well have been my real parents.

Occasionally, I would have to fill out forms or have to consider my genetic background. Obviously it was a bit of a problem that I couldn't be aware of things like genetic health risks. But in my day to day life, those issues weren't important. This was my family – the people who knew me best. They were the ones who came to my sports events; who knew not to wake me early on a Sunday; who bought me my favourite marshmallow fish as treats. We shared everything except blood.

*As I imagine Antony's life with his family, it is a great pity that I am unable to interview his parents. In fact, aside from his sister Mandy, with whom Antony has little contact and who seems a difficult character, there is nobody to provide an additional or alternative perspective of the Egnal family and their experiences. Either they were indeed as insular as*



*Antony is suggesting, or he simply hasn't let on about other players in his early life. And from what he has said about her, I fear that Mandy would not be too keen to talk to me, and that even asking for her contact details would be somehow offensive to Antony. So I am pleasantly surprised when he responds: "I have no issue with you contacting Mandy. As they say in the classics, timing is everything in life. She happens to be in a very good space at the moment so I'm sure she'd be fine with you contacting her as well."*

*I start with an introductory email to Mandy, using a tone that is extremely warm, if a little apologetic. My fantasy of her character has led me to expect a hesitant and possibly hostile response. But she replies immediately with: 'Dear Joanne. Thank you for your mail. I would love to help, although my story is quite different and not the happy ending as Antony's (sic). As Antony is, I am open too, a wonderful trait we both learnt from the most amazing person - our mother. I look forward to hearing from you soon.' She suggests communicating via MSN Messenger – a real-time Internet chat service using written response – and in the meantime, I send her questions to think about.*

*It takes me days to connect with Mandy on MSN Messenger, and I am anxious to hear her story. I am also intrigued to talk to this feisty sister of Antony's whose MSN Messenger name is suffixed with icons of a heart and a rainbow, and whose attached photograph is of a sultry brunette with airbrushed skin and piercing dark eyes. When we finally meet online, the exchange is short-lived and tantalising:*

Jo says:

Hi Mandy

Mandy says:

Hi jo

Jo says:

nice to meet you – virtually!

Mandy says:

you too

Mandy says:

things have been very hectic, sorry i never got a chance to get back to you. I haven't stopped thinking about all the questions

Jo says:

i understand completely – it's been pretty chaotic here too

Mandy says:

So what do u say about my big brother- amazing !!!

Jo says:

The story is remarkable. I first heard about it from my hairdresser – of all people!

Mandy says:

they must eb the talk fo the town (sic)

Jo says:  
**Ha ha! I guess you could say that**

Mandy says:  
**I think it was kind of amazing too (sic)**

Jo says:  
**Yes. It's not every day that you have adoption/reunion stories like that – as you said, not everyone has that experience**

Mandy says:  
**i am actually very Jel.....I guess for his partents it was super wonderful (sic)**

Jo says:  
**They are overwhelmed with it.**

Jo says:  
**But they are all very lucky.**

Jo says:  
**I would really love to hear more about your story, if you are willing/able.**

Mandy says:  
**well mine i guess is different**

Mandy says:  
**after my mother died it became MORE of an issue to find my parents. As little girl i always wondered about them**

Jo says:  
**I'm sure!**

Mandy says:  
**for girls it is different**

Jo says:  
**how so?**

Mandy says:  
**Ant never was interested to know till Mark was born. I guess being a mother changes a lot**

Mandy says:  
**any way after my mother died I went to find her. I was lucky too. My neighbours sister was a social worker in Wynberg**

Jo says:  
**oh?**

Mandy says:  
**yep**

Mandy says:  
**shit Jo. My son just got haome (sic). Can we take a rain check for about 30 min**

Jo says:  
**No problem! I'll check back in then...**

Mandy says:  
**ok great. thanks**

Jo says:  
**cheers for now...**

*I was intrigued and confused; Mandy's tone and sentiments seemed vastly different to what I had imagined and I was eager to get to know her. This form of communication was frustratingly slow and one-dimensional, but at least I was managing to chip away at the story.*

*But Mandy did not re-appear on MSN Messenger that night and the following day she sent an email apologising.*

*It would be many weeks before I would finally hear her full story.*

Antony:

When I left school, I had no desire to serve the apartheid government through conscription. Going to university was one way of avoiding military service. So that's what I did.

For a while, I had wanted to study medicine. I believe that my decision to pursue that career was shaped by my upbringing, and more specifically, by the fact that my father was a pharmacist. Often I would go to his pharmacy in Coronationville and help out. Many of the poorer folk could not afford regular medical care and they would come in with their various ailments to see 'Dr' Egnal. My father would dish out free band aids and proper medication.

Also, from the ages of 10 to 16, I made the annual trip to the Jewish youth camp Habonim, near Hermanus in the Cape. Each year, my dad would meticulously pack me a first aid kit to take with. I became proficient at doctoring wounds and taking out splinters, very often fulfilling the role of amateur doctor so that the other kids wouldn't have to go see the real doctor.

Once I reached Standard Eight, I focused on getting good enough grades to study medicine at the University of Cape Town which had one of the best programmes.

When the time came, my parents were distraught about my leaving. We had been such a close family and their lives revolved around their children. But they knew it was what I wanted to do, and they had always supported me.

I was accepted into Smuts Hall, a prestigious ivy-covered residence. Fortunately, having spent all those years at Habonim meeting kids from around the country, I was never lonely in Cape Town. I had friends and family – my mother's sister had been living there. In addition, it seemed I was extremely eligible, being a doctor bachelor. I was often invited out for Friday night Shabbat dinners to meet the equally-eligible daughters of the house!

In my third year at varsity, it became clear that my parents had no intention of getting on with their lives in Johannesburg without me. They had often spoken about coming to Cape Town, especially my mother, so at the end of my third year, they sold everything they owned in Johannesburg and moved down to a house in Camps Bay. Part of me thought it was a pity. My

father had such a successful pharmacy in Jo'burg and a lovely home. He bought another pharmacy in Long Street, in the middle of town, but it wasn't quite the same clientele whom he loved. I think he made a sacrifice by coming to Cape Town. And I'm not always sure it was worth it for him.

Even so, I was glad to have them nearby. My mother and I bought the house in Camps Bay together. It was a very basic home, with a gorgeous upstairs living room overlooking the sea. My mom thought there was no point moving to Camps Bay unless she could see the sea, but the place needed some expansion. My dad wasn't happy about the house. When he saw it for the first time, he just said: "You bought me half a house. You bought me half a house." But for the next six months, my mother and I had a lot of fun designing the expansions and supervising builders.

I loved living in Camps Bay, although we felt like the poor amongst the wealthy: we were surrounded by well-known jewellers on both sides and fancy houses across the road! But my parents, being who they were, were friendly with everybody. I still remember the day that one of our neighbours, Thomas, was standing on the pavement in front of his house, watering his garden and smoking a cigarette. My mother was trying to quit smoking, but I suddenly heard her calling: "Thomas, Thomas! Do not put that cigarette out!" She came charging up the driveway, walked straight up to him without even greeting him, took the cigarette and held it to her nose. She spent a few seconds just inhaling the smoke from the burning cigarette, not taking a puff, just breathing in the smell. Then, satisfied with her whiff of nicotine, she turned and walked straight back into the house!

When I first moved to Cape Town, I started jogging to get exercise. A few times a week, I would take a break from my studies and run up to Rhodes Memorial or through Newlands Forest. When I moved to the other side of the mountain, I kept up the jogging and ran up towards Lion's Head, passing Camps Bay High School with the students piling out of buses and cars. I always appreciated being in such a beautiful city. After growing up in concrete Johannesburg, it was a pleasure to enjoy the magnificence of Cape Town.

Other than my jogging and playing rugby and squash for the university, I had to limit my social activities. Every year, Medical School became more hands on, more clinical, with more

patients to see, so I had to focus on that. I did date a few girls in my first few years at varsity, but I only had one serious girlfriend in that time. She wasn't Jewish, though, and I knew that we would never marry.

I would sometimes bring girls home to meet my parents. If it ever looked like it was getting serious – like after two or three dates – my father would do something which other people thought really strange. He would approach the girl for a quiet conversation about her mother's maiden name. Afterwards, the girl would inevitably confront me, demanding to know why my father had asked such weird questions.

I realised that he was only looking out for my best interests. He had to be sure that I wouldn't inadvertently date my half-sister.

I was in my fourth year when I met René Forman. She worked as a student radiographer at Groote Schuur Hospital and I found myself going out of my way to walk through her Department just so that I could 'bump' into her. Eventually, I plucked up the courage to ask her out.

Once my father had established that René was 'safe' to date, things got pretty serious between us. We liked the same activities, and spent time going for hikes up the mountain or walks on the beach. She had a good heart and a strong will. In fact, that will often clashed with my mother's. In my mom's mind, no girl was good enough for her little boy and she saw any serious girlfriend as a threat to losing her son rather than the chance to gain a daughter-in-law. René was pretty hot-headed herself and would stand her ground with my mom. So there was often a bit of pressure. I wished that they could have a good relationship. But I wasn't giving René up. She always knew exactly what I wanted and needed, and of course she had a close understanding of my chosen profession. Because nothing stood in the way of my goal to become a doctor and René knew what that would take.

I have always been conscientious. I've always had a constant need to be in control of my life and my behaviour – I have never swayed towards abuse of alcohol or drugs or anything like that. And where my profession is concerned, I've always tried to do that little bit extra to

become that little bit better as a doctor. It was thanks to this that I met one of the early and most important influences in my medical life.

During my studies, we were entitled to do an elective with a practising doctor. I don't know who exactly referred me to Dr Solly Lison, but I do know that my passion lay in engaging with patients, so I wanted to choose a doctor who was recommended in that regard. Although I really enjoyed gynaecology and paediatrics too, I couldn't see myself as a specialist dealing with a single issue. I preferred a broader approach to medicine. So I went off to do my elective with Dr Lison.

He was a dedicated physician, the kind that I aspired to become one day. I admired his relationships with his patients, the respect he had for them and his sheer devotion to his job. I spent a lot of time at his surgery, observing and assisting where possible. I chatted with his patients and learned the true meaning of 'bedside manner.' I also enjoyed the house visits. In general, Dr Lison really helped me understand the environment and mechanics of the healing profession. I revered him. He showed me what real medicine was about rather than simply the academia of it.

So my life in Cape Town, in Camps Bay, was snug. I was lucky to have my parents around and my relationship with René snowballed. We dated seriously for three years before I finally asked her to marry me.

At the time that we got engaged, I was doing my internship at Victoria Hospital in Wynberg and at Groote Schuur Hospital. Having to do an internship was a blessing for me because it allowed me to delay military conscription. You could delay it for as long as you were studying, so my full medical training was six years at university and a seventh year of compulsory internship. But I couldn't put it off forever.

René shared my vision of not wanting to raise children in the apartheid system. We had both travelled overseas a number of times and knew that South Africa was not representative of the world at large – there had to be a better place for us somewhere out there.

Also, I was determined to become an excellent doctor and really wanted to do a specialty in family medicine. There was no higher training of that nature available in South Africa at the time, so I knew that I'd have to study abroad. I think that if the country had been stable, we

would have looked to going overseas for my training only and then to return. But that didn't look like it was going to be a possibility. This was the late 80s and the country was in a real mess. We didn't see a future for ourselves in South Africa.

The big question was where we would go. René had lived in America in the late 70s with her parents. But their experience was not a positive one and they returned to South Africa. Still, she had access to a green card which made it far less complicated than the other options we considered, like England.

My mother could not begin to believe that I would leave the country. She was so distressed that she projected all her anger and blame onto René. She insisted that René was pushing for the move and totally ignored my desire to specialise abroad. She just wouldn't accept that it was a joint decision. It was one of the few times in my life that there was real conflict and sadness.

René's parents took it hard too. Her father was a warm person who was easy to get on with. Her mom was more reserved and you had to win her heart, especially when you were the man about to marry her daughter. And unfortunately things didn't get off to such a good start with me and V (her name was Verona but we called her 'V' for short). On the first two or three Shabbats we had together, I spilt wine on her white tablecloth and I was convinced, although probably incorrectly so, that she gave me a smaller helping of dessert as payback! Their experience in America hadn't been a good one so they probably couldn't understand why we wanted to go.

But I knew it was the right move for us. As much as I hated to upset our parents, I had to keep a clear head about it. So we started investigating what it would take to get us there. René had to apply for a green card based on her parents' one. But we had no idea when it would come through. This meant that it was very difficult to plan the wedding because we could not get married before the green card was approved, otherwise she would lose her eligibility. In addition, the military were now interested in enrolling me and it looked as if that could take place in June of '87. So we had time pressure, but very little control.

The green card came through in late February and we quickly organised a civil wedding at René's home the following Sunday in March '87. Her uncle, Frank Silbert, was a senior advocate in the city and had the license to officiate. So we got married and René filed the papers for me the very next day.

But the relief was short-lived. We didn't know how long my green card would take to come through and military service was looming closer. So we took up a new tactic.

I had heard that one could go to rural Canada with the type of training I had. I could work in the under-serviced areas for at least four months and then move from there into America when my green card came through. I contacted the medical bureau in Canada's central province of Saskatchewan and they put me in touch with a few clinics. I made one phone call, had a brief interview over the phone, and was offered the job. My papers would be waiting for me in London.

A couple of months later, we were married traditionally at the Gardens Shul with the reception at the Mount Nelson Hotel.

It was an overcast, chilly day. The ceremony was moving and intimate. We decided not to have a huge wedding and only invited about 80 guests. We preferred to keep the money we would have spent on a big wedding because we knew we were leaving soon after.

Our final days in Cape Town were difficult, particularly because of my parents. My mother was overcome by sadness. She still could not accept that her son was married and, moreover, that he was going to leave her. She did not disguise her disappointment and I felt guilty at my decision. But I knew I had to go.

Sadly, that pre-empted one of my life's greatest pains. The last time I ever saw my mother upright and walking and talking was at D.F. Malan airport in Cape Town when we said goodbye. She was struck by a fatal illness within two years of us leaving, and the next time I saw her was on her deathbed in Groote Schuur Hospital...



*They arrived in London, way-station for anyone en-route to anywhere. His mind was soggy with turmoil. He had a constant need to rationalise: he had done this for their future. But at what cost?*

*It was mid-summer in London. The city sweated with unaccustomed heat. The sky was not quite blue, not quite grey. The sun, filtering through the haze, was not quite yellow, not quite white. The grass was England green.*

*They reminded themselves that this was the only vacation they were likely to have for months. So they ran the tourist route, riding bright red buses, hailing bulky black taxis, and walking at the city's pace. Standing at Oxford Circus, they marvelled at the sheer volume of people. Cape Town was a hamlet by comparison.*

*Soho stunned the sleepy conservatism of their South African roots. They averted their eyes from mohawked punks, Madame Jojo's, and liquor stores open on Sundays. They tasted strawberries and fresh cream at Burrough market; bought new pairs of takkies – no, "sneakers" – at Lillywhites; and posed with Cupid at Piccadilly.*

*Antony visited an uncle who gave them money to take in the shows. They saw Cats, Les Miserables, Starlight Express and went to sleep with 'Memory' on their lips. It was the best wedding gift of the lot.*

*Too soon, the week ended. Official papers in hand, they left London, bound for a new life on a new continent...*

Ren promised that she would not cry when we arrived in the small town in the Saskatchewan. Only trouble was, the towns got smaller and smaller as we got closer and closer to our final destination. I should have known what we were letting ourselves in for because when I initially opened an atlas to look for La Ronge, Saskatchewan, I could not even find it on the map. It looked as though there was a road heading north, but then it seemed to stop in the middle of nowhere with nothing but wilderness ahead.

The host physician's family actually stood on the tarmac as the small prop plane landed. There wasn't even a terminal building. They drove us to our rented apartment and said they'd be back in a couple of hours to take us to dinner in one of the three restaurants.

La Ronge was a small town of about 5000 folk, half Indian and half Canadian, many of whom had left big-city life in order to raise their kids in a life in touch with nature. The main industry was tourism, because Lake La Ronge was a base for many fishing camps. There were also some wildlife growers who used the banks of the river to grow their flora. And it was the base for the legal system in the northern part of the province; the judges and lawyers resided in the town and would then fly every week to conduct legal proceedings in the outlying communities.

I was to work as a physician in the single clinic in town where there were only about five or six doctors. We rotated our duties between the emergency room and the clinic itself, and we delivered all the babies in and around La Ronge. Part of my job description – which I had not read about and which may have altered my decision to take the job in the first place – was the fact that we had to visit the four Indian reservations north of the town once a week. The journey took about an hour in a plane that they called the ‘workhorse of the north’ – a Second World War era plane, either a Beaver or an Otter, equipped with floats so that it could land on the banks of the lake. Now, I don’t like to fly. I like to be in control and have my two feet firmly on the ground. So this part of the job was extremely unappealing. But by the time it became clear what my responsibilities were, it was too late to back down.

For all my doubts, though, it was interesting and challenging work. I met a lot of wonderful people and we landed up staying in La Ronge for far longer than our projected four months. Since we were dealing with governmental bureaus and the US immigration department, our papers took 18 months to process!

What shocked us the most during our time in the Saskatchewan was the severity of the winter. I remember the first time that snow fell. It was the middle of October and there was a huge dump. Neither Ren nor I had ever seen snow before and I could not believe my eyes at the sight. I cancelled work that day so that I could stay home and play in the snow!

But the novelty soon wore off. Winter in the Saskatchewan lasted six months and the temperatures often got below minus 40 degrees Celsius. The lake froze over so thick and hard that a winter road was ploughed across it so that supplies could be delivered to outlying clinics and communities. For someone who had grown up in temperate South Africa, this was hard to believe.

Ren busied herself by doing voluntary work at the local library. She also taught gymnastics at the school and did some medical transcription work for the clinic. Even though the place was remote and desolate, its people were warm and wonderful. We made friendships that have lasted! Some folks had holiday cabins north of the town and throughout the week they would talk excitedly about getting away from La Ronge for the weekend, only to spend more time in isolation in their holiday homes!

For Ren and I, the best entertainment was to drive four hours south for some civilisation and culture. We had a large blue GMC – an American-made car, which was a bit like the minivans that South African taxi drivers use, except that it only had two seats and a rusty hole in the floor so you could see the asphalt below. It was like a reverberating drum, careering down the highway at 50 miles an hour. There was such a loud din in the car that we couldn't talk to one another, so we had to make the four hour journey in silence. Sometimes we'd hit Saskatoon just for a day. We'd leave at seven in the morning, drive four hours to do a little shopping before lunch, then do some more after lunch, then catch an early bite before settling in for the seven o'clock showing of a movie we wanted to see. We'd come out the movie's back door, then run back in line for the 9 o'clock show, come out at eleven and drive four hours home to crash and want to do it all over again as soon as possible!

Medically, it was an enriching time for me. I got hands-on exposure to all kinds of cases and took care of a wide array of patients. I would love to document all my stories from that time because some were remarkable. There was one case in particular that I will always remember. We had a woman in labour with what is called a 'prolapsed cord.' This means that the umbilical cord comes down through the vagina ahead of the baby itself. Every time the woman contracts, the cord is squeezed and intermittently cuts off the baby's oxygen supply. It's an incredibly dangerous situation and requires urgent attention.

The clinic could handle many medical emergencies, but the two of us who were on staff that night were general practitioners and both the gynaecologist and the neonatologist were out of town. Our only option was to call for help, replace the cord into the vagina to prevent it from

strangling the infant, and push up on the baby's head. I got a nurse to help me, gave the mother some medication to relax her uterus and organised an emergency flight to Saskatoon.

It took us about an hour and a half to get to Saskatoon and another 20 minutes to drive along the road from the airport to the hospital. The staff had been notified that there was a prolapsed cord patient coming from the north and as we hit the labour and delivery floor, everybody was sitting around and drinking coffee. They did not believe it possible that the baby could still be alive. Still with my hand in the woman's vagina and pushing up on the baby's head, I could feel that the cord was pulsating which invariably meant that the baby was alive. So I just shouted, "Let's get going. We've got a baby to save." All credit to that hospital staff: we had the baby out in five minutes flat. Safe and sound. I've thought about that story so many times. There was definitely some power above shining down on us that day – that baby's odds of surviving were minimal.

Living in La Ronge, Ren and I only had each other and we grew closer. I do believe that when you experience things in life that are out of your normal context, you have to draw on inner strength to get through the situation. As a couple, that helps you bond and form a solid unit. On the down-side, we never had family around to support us or to bounce things off and sometimes, as with any relationship, we had our differences. One time, we had an argument and René was furious. She got in the car and in her mad state started driving down the highway. After an hour, she looked around and all she saw were wide open fields stretching for miles. Realising she had nowhere to go, she turned around and came back. She had such a serious look on her face when she stalked through the door and all I could think of was to laugh and say, "So where was that going to get you?" We joke about it today, but at the time it didn't seem so funny to her...

So we bided our time waiting to get into America. Unfortunately, the local Canadian cable station carried Detroit inner city news channels, so every time we flicked on the TV we saw nothing appealing from what was being broadcast south of the border. My visions of America were shattered by what I saw on that television.

But I knew that I had to start looking for work if we were to settle there eventually. I needed a residency in family medicine and scoured the country for one. A colleague of mine had settled in Wilmington, Delaware and he eventually managed to organise me a position. I readily accepted and agreed that we would be there as soon as we could. The person who called me, Dean Walters, said that he would hold the position. But it took at least another nine months for our papers to come through. Dean held that job. He had local graduates knocking down his door wanting the position and he would not release it. We owe him a lot. It has now become a tradition that I call him every Thanksgiving to find out how he is and to say thank you for what he did for us.

In October 1989 we finally said goodbye to La Ronge. Winter was about to set in and I'm not sure that either of us could have endured another one.

We flew to Baltimore, Maryland, and then headed up the Interstate 95 to Wilmington to begin our new lives in the USA.



Antony and René



## WALKING NAKED DOWN ADDERLEY STREET

**I**n the dusk of Lynette's dining room, a glass of Coke Light is already waiting for me, sweating on the plastic coaster. Temperatures today set record highs for February, and my shirt is sticky after the short walk from the car. Lynette looks cool. She has freshened her make-up and opened all the windows in the flat, trying to catch a cross-breeze. But the afternoon is still.

Lynette's husband, Max, is lying on a chaise longue on the veranda, just outside the dining room where Lynette and I sit. He has buried himself in the day's newspaper.

Lynette:

Max and I got married when I was 19 and he was 20. By then, we had been through more than most adults. Our wedding was some much needed light relief.

For our honeymoon, we flew to Durban (which I hated: it was humid and full of cockroaches) and took the Union Castle Line to Port Elizabeth, East London and back to Cape Town. The boat trip lasted five days, on a rickety old ship which creaked and had bunk beds. We laughed a lot though, especially when I kept ignoring people who called me Mrs Langman. I had always been Lynette Zinn! I just couldn't get used to my married name!

When we came back to Cape Town, we took a flat in Sea Point. My father did the whole thing up. He gave us a bedroom suite, lounge and dining suites, a fridge and a stove. He was in the furniture business and he spoiled us. The flat had two bedrooms with parquet flooring throughout, right near the beachfront. You could hear the seagulls.

I didn't want to wait too long to have children. So when I skipped a period about a year after getting married, I was ecstatic. I immediately knew I was pregnant but I was too scared to be excited until I'd had confirmation. I went back to Dr Shapiro – the same obstetrician who had delivered David – and he took a urine sample and did a physical exam. I remember feeling shy, like I couldn't look him in the face. But he made no reference to David and was an absolute professional.

More than anything, I was relieved that I had fallen pregnant. After David, I worried that I would be punished for what I had done. So when Dr Shapiro confirmed the pregnancy, I was over the moon.

Max was ecstatic too, but I found it hard to tell my parents. I sat with the phone in my hand, about to dial their number, thinking: 'How am I going to tell them?' I was engulfed by those same feelings of terror at what happened the last time they found out I was pregnant. After a good few minutes, I swallowed my fear and made the call. I had hardly finished my sentence when my mother shouted: "Mazeltov!" and then, "Lola, Lynette is going to have a baby!" I needn't have worried – they were both as excited as I was.

From the beginning of the pregnancy, I noticed every twinge and shift. You know like when you watch a movie for the second time and you see things that you weren't aware of the first time? Everything went along just fine. Until my fourth month.

It was a typical day – I hadn't been doing anything out of the ordinary. I went to the bathroom and when I looked down, I knew I was being punished. You see, I had a show...Spotting – a bit of bleeding. I thought this was my punishment for David.

The gynae put me on bed-rest for six weeks, with my feet propped up on cushions. I went into a slump. Depressed and morbid, I was too scared to get up to go to the toilet. I was terrified of losing this precious child. I kept thinking: 'If I lose this one, it'll be the second baby I've lost.'

At the time, I was 21 and working as a legal secretary but I had to stop working for bed-rest, so Max had to work extra hard in his job as a collector for a furniture company. But eventually things returned to normal. I spent hours knitting booties and bed jackets, packing them all up neatly in little boxes, ready to go. And I mainly knitted in blue because I just knew this was going to be a boy.

In my eighth month, at a regular check-up with Dr Shapiro, he said: "My girlie, this baby's head is not dropping. You see, when you've already had one Caesar, you can only have a natural birth with subsequent babies under certain circumstances. But often history repeats itself, so given the situation we had the first time round, I'm not going to take chances. I'm going to deliver this baby by Caesar too."

I was so relieved. I still had visions of all that initial pain and trauma from the last time. I even remember thinking: 'Good, this is the easy way. They put you to sleep, take the baby out, and that's that.' And I was terrified of this baby being in distress.

We set the date for the 14<sup>th</sup> of December, and all the while I was living a life of pretence. I had to pretend that everything was new to me, that I knew nothing of pregnancy and labour and Caesars. One of my friends even commented about how much I seemed to know already, and I had to cover up by saying that I'd read a lot of books. For so long, my life was consumed by lies.

In my ninth month, I counted the days until the Caesar date. I could not wait to actually *see* this baby. My bags were packed for the hospital weeks before although I only went in on the 13<sup>th</sup>. Colin Phillip Langman was born the next day.



The hospital was different, but the whole process brought memories flooding back. I was prepped for a 'cold Caesar' – a Caesar without labour – and wheeled into theatre. I remembered the same cold steel of the operating table, the bright lights, the antiseptic smell of Savlon, the doctor's mask which wasn't big enough to cover the creases at his eyes. Our family friend and doctor Uncle Mike was there too – he was the assistant to Dr Shapiro. I remembered the same haze of drifting off to sleep and then finally waking to: "It's a boy...boy...boy..."

Max was waiting for me when I came out of the delivery room and as soon as I could speak, I asked to see the baby. But the nurse told me that Caesarean babies had to be put into incubators for a few hours after birth. So I would have to wait.

In the meantime, the pain was excruciating. I kept asking for something to help, but the nurses refused. The hospital was run by nuns and although most were kind, there was one in particular who could not hold back her disgust. "Your pain is your punishment," she said. "You have sinned and you must be punished." Of course I thought she was talking about David, and I was horrified. How could she have known? Did Dr Shapiro tell her? Was it obvious? Of course I realised later that she was not referring to David. She simply did not agree with sexual intercourse – in her eyes, that was my sin. When I think about it now, I can't understand why a person like that would work at a maternity hospital! At the time, though, I was just struck dumb.

A few hours later, the staff switched and a nurse brought me my son. They put him in my arms and when I looked down at him, my pain just melted away. He was the image of my father: olive skin and pitch-black hair.

We took Colin home on the tenth day. My father bought us the biggest pram you have ever seen, as well as a cot. We were so spoiled!

I had a nurse to help me – the same nurse my mother used when she had given birth to my youngest sister Jennifer. Sister van der Merwe took control. She used to wrap the baby up in a cocoon and she called all her charges '*Aspoestertjie*' which is Afrikaans for 'Cinderella'. I don't know why she used that nickname. But every baby was called that, no matter the gender.

Of course Max thought the baby was ugly until he was three months old! I think he was terrified of Colin. I couldn't blame him – I was terrified too! And I would often look at Colin and think "I wonder if David looked like this." I kept making up comparisons in my head and wondering about my first born. So having Colin did stir up the most vivid thoughts about David. But mostly, my new baby just eased the pain of giving up my first one.

*Lynette unclasps her hands with a flash of cinnamon from her still-shiny nails. She gets up to close the lounge window, shutting out the skeins of night mist which have come in over the sea. She pops her head round to the veranda and checks on Max and his glass of iced J&B whisky.*

*During my early interviews with Lynette, Max seems somewhat reluctant to talk to me, despite his jovial, 'Father Christmas' looks. He's about the same height as Lynette, moustached and quite grey with a generous mouth that he's not yet ready to stretch into a smile. Today, he is obviously feeling the heat and is wearing as little as is appropriate; he reminds me of my grandfather who used to strip down to his white Woolworths vest and plaid cotton shorts as soon as he came home from work, whatever the weather.*

*Max always nods when he sees me and shakes my hand. He is polite, with a slight wariness, and I'm conscious not to push him. He is always present though, always just beyond earshot.*

*Lynette refills my drink, straightens the table-cloth, and sits down to continue.*

Talking about David in those early days, I must tell you one thing. After David was taken away from me, I was only ever told one piece of information about him. Our family doctor, Uncle Mike, had told me that David went to a Jewish family in Johannesburg. He trusted that he would be well looked after, but that was all he knew.

Now in our early married life, Max and I were friendly with this one couple and the wife was not able to conceive. They adopted a little boy when he was 18 months old. When the wife used to talk to me about it, I would wonder if there was any chance that their little boy could be mine. In reality, I knew it wasn't possible, because David was in Johannesburg, but I wondered nonetheless. Adoptions in those days were closed – the law didn't allow you any

access to or information about your child, so I conjured up these fantasies about this couple's baby. These were the first people I had ever known to adopt, and I tried to force pieces together that just didn't fit, convincing myself that they had David. Then one day she invited me round to meet the baby, and the minute I saw him I knew he wasn't mine. I expected to know David in an instant, but this child was a stranger. So I accepted the truth. But until that moment, I tortured myself. You see, David was never far from my heart, and my imagination. To my mind, he was still my child.

Two years after Colin was born, I fell pregnant again.

In October 1966, I went in to have what everyone else thought was my second child at St Joseph's Hospital – it's now called the Vincent Pallotti. It was by now a familiar process: the prepping, the theatre, the doctors...Everything was the same except for what I heard as the haze of the anaesthetic wore off. "It's a girl...girl...girl..." Lara Sharon Langman.

Lara was the most beautiful baby with a rosebud mouth and cute little dimples. But even though she looked angelic, she was a nightmare child. For six months, she screamed and screamed. Even Sister van der Merwe couldn't sort her out. My mother would come over to help and would eventually leave because she couldn't take all the screaming. After a few months, I took Lara to a doctor who said that if she didn't stop the crying, he'd have to put her into the Buxton home – a place for unmarried mothers and also a type of clinic where you could take problematic babies. The night after that doctor's conclusion, Lara slept all the way through!

So we were a neat little family for a few years. The husband, the wife, the two children. Or so everyone thought. The 9<sup>th</sup> of August – David's birthday – would come and go, and each time Max and I would take the chance to talk about David. Other than that, we hardly did because I couldn't express myself properly and Max wasn't comfortable talking about it. I sometimes lit a candle on that day, in the privacy of my bedroom. Then I'd let myself imagine his voice, the colour of his hair, how tall he must be now that he was five, six, seven years old...You see, I used to think about the specifics, but I never really created a whole image. I couldn't have drawn a picture of him or anything like that. It was more about the fantasy of a child I could

never know. And I always said the same prayer: 'Let him be safe, let him be happy, let him be loved'.

We carried on with our lives. Max was still working at the furniture company. But a few years later, the company started heading towards bankruptcy. We were worried. We had two young children – Colin was six years old and Lara four – and we needed the security of Max's income. At the time, my cousin was on holiday here in Cape Town. He ran the Savoy Hotel in Kimberley and he told us that De Beers, the diamond company, wanted to open a hotel for their reps in a mining village just near Kimberley. They were looking for a hotel manager.

We decided to take up the job offer and Max left to do the training in a little town called Lime Acres. I joined him three months later with the kids. I knew nothing about Lime Acres except for one little old wives' warning: apparently, the water in that part of the world was very fertile...!

*To Lynette, Lime Acres sounded exotic. She liked the way it rolled on her tongue, like a tropical cocktail with a slice of fruit and a pink umbrella and blocks of ice that look turquoise. 'L-l-l-lime Acres.'*

*She arrived there in the late afternoon, barely finding the place. It was a speck – as unnoticed on the map as one of the particles of dust that hovered over its bare streets. She could see the dust, could feel it creeping under her fingernails, taste it settling on her tongue. L-l-l-lime Acres.*

*The nearest towns were places like Witputs, Danielskuil, Papkuil: places she could barely pronounce, let alone recognise. She was 100 miles from Kimberley, and could see no sign of the myriad diamonds that had brought her – or anyone – to this place. What were they thinking?*

*Outside the hotel was a patch of lawn. It was watered, daily, but it seemed to have shed its dye in the dust. It was almost green – not grass-green, pistachio-green.*

*The children played out there on the lawn. Their friendships were instantaneous and uncomplicated. Max was entrenched already. He was the manager and he was busy.*

*Soon, though, she was busy too. The manager's wife. She worked the reception during the day and the service bar at night time. The children went to the school and made more friends. They played in the lobby and on the patch of pistachio.*

*She was not lonely. She had no time for loneliness. She welcomed guests, saw to their needs, found her place in the dust. At night, after the children were asleep, she mixed drinks downstairs in the bar. The locals gathered there too and she shared their stories. She found a taste for country life – slow, petty, steady. She talked rainfall – “62mm in February!” – local news – “so imagine we had an earthquake here like in Tulbagh” – and spirits – “Red Heart Rum: that stuff can punch you in the eye.” She found a taste for all of it, except the rum. She preferred to stick to water...*

*Max and Lynette had only been in Lime Acres for eight months when she missed a period. She continued to work in the hotel throughout the pregnancy, buoyed by strong health and the help of close local friends Nick and Natalie. But she chose to return to Cape Town to have the baby, and moved back in with her parents eight weeks before the birth of her third son – Jonathan Michael Langman, born January 1972.*

Everyone thought our little family was the perfect combination: boy – girl – boy. Little did they know...

Jonny was an even-tempered, content baby and when he was six weeks old, I returned to Lime Acres. But I knew right away that we could not continue living there. We were the only Jews and my children attended Sunday School every weekend! I knew we would have to leave if we wanted to give our children a Jewish upbringing.

So we returned to Cape Town a few months later. Colin was eight years old, Lara six and Jonny under a year. David would have been 11.

We took up the management of the Capri Hotel in Worcester Road, Sea Point. Once again, my life revolved around working in the hotel and bringing up the children, although this time, it was back to city life and city complications. In many ways, I really missed the country. Life there was simple and there was only one answer for everything.

Take the case of finding a doctor. It was never important to me before I had children. My parents were friendly with Uncle Mike and he had been our house doctor for as long as I could remember. But he was in Claremont, and we were at least a 25 minute drive away, so I had to find a doctor closer to home.

I tried a few doctors but I wasn't happy. And then a friend recommended Dr Solly Lison. In fact Max remembered that he had gone to school with him. I made an appointment to meet him at his surgery up the road, and I liked him instantly. Maybe it was because Max had known him, but we developed an excellent rapport and eventually became socially friendly with him and his wife.

*I know Dr Solly Lison. He's a Sea Point institution – one of the medical old guard who carry big black boxes filled with vials, pills and ice-cream sticks to stop your tongue wagging while you say 'aaah.' He's a quiet man, with sure hands and a hidden wit – the type who forms lasting friendships.*

Solly attended to all of us and nothing was ever too much for him – even when all three of the kids got chicken pox at exactly the same time! They used to call him 'Uncle Solly' and he had a wonderful way with them. He was a very good support to us; no doubt about that...I wonder what he would have said if he had known about David...

So we lived and worked in Sea Point for about three years. After a while, I wanted a change from the hotel business and decided to go back to my own career. I had previously worked as a legal secretary and I got a job at my old law firm. Max stayed on at the Capri.

We bought a house on auction in Camps Bay: a wonderful home which I had my heart set on. We picked it up for a bargain because the original owner couldn't afford the bond payments... It was strange to be back in Camps Bay; living there brought back uncomfortable memories. But it was also the first time we'd really had a place of our own and, after all the moving around of the past few years, I finally felt settled.

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*For the most part, Lynette prefers to meet me at her home. Although decades in the making, her story is still a raw secret kept from many. She says that telling it “is like walking naked down Adderley Street.” So we take up our usual places at the dining room table, empty except for our two glasses and a bowl of faux fruit in the middle.*

*When we first meet, it is summertime, and our meetings track the progress of the sun. From the red-and-gold blaze of January, through the unfurled warmth of February, we move towards early March – the best time of year in Cape Town. The city starts to breathe again after the summer rush of tourists, and the weather settles into a groove of day-in-day-out bliss. Nights are slow in coming and when they do, they are ushered in by light offshore breezes and the soft glow of candles in sand-weighted paper bags on the beach. March days are a gift. All that taints them is the knowledge that they are numbered.*

Lynette:

I got a frantic phone call one day at work from my mother to say that my father was ill.

I don't remember getting to their flat but I remember that my sisters Jenny and Maureen came too. My father was terribly confused, talking about strange things, not recognising things that he should have. Overnight [*snaps her fingers*]. Just like that.

Soon after, he was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease. And that was the beginning of the end for a man who, in my lifetime, had never wanted to miss a day's work. This was an absolute shock.

My father, Lola Zinn, was known for his grooming. With his dark hair, beautiful skin and neatly trimmed moustache, he was a Clarke Gable look-alike, and just as debonair. He was an immigrant from Eastern Europe and my parents were both conservative. Their home and their personalities seemed all about neatness, order and good behaviour. My father even kept all his shoes stacked carefully in velvet bags! But he was also warm and charming, with a lovely sense of humour. My mother, Tilly Zinn, was extremely beautiful – too beautiful to be approachable, in fact. She was a dutiful wife and always kept a well-ordered home.

My early relationship with my father was disastrous but it had been restored and by now we were very close. I felt that he had more than made up for things by being the most amazing

grandfather to my kids. His relationship with them was incredible. He would come over to our house every Sunday with a big box full of groceries, meats and sweets. He said my mother shopped too much! Then he would take the kids to the Blue Train in Green Point and ride round and round the track with them. He bought them their first everything: first tricycle, first dollhouse...He adored them and they adored him.

My relationship with my mother had improved too. She was never as demonstrative or loving as my father was, even in the early days, but we had found a way to become close. I hated to see him ill, and I hated to see her in such distress over my father's illness. He went in and out of hospital and when he was there, he would imagine that he was back in the furniture factory he used to run and say things like, "they're putting the wrong handles on the cupboards." He would break out suddenly into Russian or Yiddish and then stare vacantly into space. Eventually, it was almost impossible to communicate with him.

It all became too much for my mother to handle. My father needed constant care and couldn't do a thing for himself. They had day and night nurses but the strain was unbearable. So my sister Maureen took him into her home and the nurses continued to care for him there.

The hardest thing was seeing my father lose his dignity. *[She pauses and eyes me cautiously]*. Uh, I'm not sure if you know...but...my father had a bit of, let's say, trouble with the law. You see, years before, he had been mixed up in a case of fraud – falsifying invoices – and he was sentenced to a jail term of 16 years, although it was reduced to 12 years on appeal and he only served two. I don't really want to talk about it much. We don't talk about it in the family at all. It's...well...embarrassing. The scandal was terrible. It was headline news, plastered all over the streets – 'Lola Zinn gets 16 years.' This was not just a snippet on the back page; it was major trauma. And at the time, I was working at a firm of lawyers, which made it very hard for me. On the day he was sentenced, I didn't go to court so one of the partners at my law firm brought back the news. It was awful. And so ironic..!

But I must just say that even in jail, he never lost his composure. The first time I went to visit him, I saw that he had shaved off his moustache – by law, you couldn't have any facial hair in prison. That neat moustache was his mark of stature, and it was gone. I can still feel



the shock that ran through me – he looked like a complete stranger. But despite the awful surroundings, I recognised his poise.

So when he got sick in his later years, it was terrible to watch him lose his composure...

As for the kids, they were growing up fast. When they wanted things, they always came to me: extra pocket money, clothes, shoes. But if they wanted advice, they went to Max. I was the nurturer, Max was the sounding board. He was strict – very strict – but they respected him and always asked his opinion. It probably seems strange to you...I mean, you haven't really seen that side of Max. But you know what they say about still waters...

They were so different from one another, my children. Colin was not a scholar – he hated school. And he and Max clashed quite a bit in his teenage years. After Matric he joined the army and he never lived at home again. He later took a job in Pretoria as a store manager. He was a born salesman, and he worked hard. That's when he really earned Max's respect. I think Max saw something of himself in Colin then: he wanted to prove that he could make it on his own. And he did. A determined, independent spirit.

Jonny was a soft child. He was the baby of the family, but even from a young age, I thought he had an old soul. He would tell me to sit down when I came home from work and he would make me a cup of tea. Considerate and kind. And people really warmed to him. He wasn't an outstanding student, in fact he was quite average. But still, he was made Vice-Head Boy of Camps Bay High School in Matric.

Lara...Well, Lara just bubbled. She always had lots of friends and activity in her life. She was a great scholar. And meticulous. Even her teenage room was neater than neat. But she was volatile too. The one sound I associate with Lara's childhood is the sound of slamming doors! If Max said something she didn't like, she would storm to her room and bang the door. Then he would march in after her and bang the door too. Quite entertaining actually! But people loved her. She was also Vice-Head Girl of Camps Bay High.

You know, after I gave David up for adoption, I promised myself that if I ever had children after him, I would be the best mother possible. I remember telling them: "I'm not only your

mother, I'm your best friend." And I really did try to live up to that promise. I do have an incredibly close relationship with my children. I like to share everything with them.

Of course, it was easiest for me to do that with Lara, being a girl. I loved to take her shopping and sit with her while she dressed up for dates. We'd play with hairstyles, put on make-up and gossip about her friends. Girl stuff. And because she was popular, she often got asked out. I mean, by the time she was 16 or 17, she had already been to two Matric dances and a doctor's ball! And I helped her dress up for all of them. She would borrow dresses from my sister Maureen who had a beautiful wardrobe. Then I would help her do her hair with curlers or a side-parting. Not that she was a fussy *kugel* or anything. Far from. But I loved these times together so they are some of my fondest memories.

*She is smiling happily at the thought and stops to pull something out of her handbag.*

Here, I found this the other day. I had totally forgotten about it until we started talking about the Lime Acres days and the kids growing up. I thought you might find it interesting...

*place near the middle. The book has aged, but I can still make out the faint picture of daisies and bees sprinkled on the cover. I open it on the first page: Diary, 1987.*

*The pages are filled with Lynette's curly scrawl. Letters are joined together with the steady swerve of upstrokes and downstrokes, each word self-conscious with the need to be neat. At least a page a day.*

*I turn to the bookmarked spot. It is headed with a flourish: 14 June '87.*

*Dear Diary*

*I'm writing this while I wait for Lara to come home from her date. She looked stunning tonight when she went out. We did her hair in big curls and she wore that lovely mauve dress that Maureen lent her with a new pair of court shoes. She has gone with Charles Silbert to his cousin's wedding at the Gardens Shul. I*

*can't remember the name of the cousin, but I know it's at Gardens. I like Charles. He is such a gentleman. They've gone out two or three times before and he always comes in to greet me and Max. I don't think it's anything serious though. I think they're just good friends. And I don't want to put her under any pressure. She's still young.*

*It's fun for her to go out for smart occasions like this wedding. As usual we had such a good time getting her ready. Although she still refuses to wear pantyhose, my modern child.*

*I think I hear her key in the lock. Just a minute...*

*Ok I'm back. Lara and I sat at the kitchen table and she told me all about her night. She said the wedding was really nice. It was quite small – just about 100 guests or so. But she said it was lots of fun with really nice people. She danced all night!*

*I asked about the flowers and the bride's dress, but she didn't take notice of those things. In some ways, we are so different! But I'm glad she had a good time. I tried to get an idea of where things are going with Charles, but she didn't give me any hints.*

*I'd better go to sleep now. Max hates it when I leave the light on too long. More tomorrow. Good night.*

So that gives you an idea of how things were during those years. Just normal. Well fortunate, if you think about what was going on in the country at the time. There was the state of emergency and sanctions. The country was in shambles. The apartheid government was on its last legs. Everything was coming to a head. But like so many other white South Africans, I lived quietly in my home and concerned myself with my own family. I didn't know about the horrible things going on in the rest of the country. At least, I think I didn't know. Did we know? No, no, I don't think we knew.

In the meantime, the kids were becoming adults, and David was still a world away. Through all those years, I still hadn't told anyone else about him. But then Max and I decided to take a

vacation to Lime Acres. We wanted to visit our old haunt and see Nick and Natalie, the couple we had been so friendly with.

I had continued to keep in touch with them after we left Lime Acres. Nick used to help me buy lottery tickets. You see, many years before, a fortune teller had predicted that I'd win a lottery. It was the strangest incident. It was before I met Max – I was about 15 years old and I took the bus into Woodstock, near the centre of town, to find this fortune teller, Professor Blythewell. He had placed an advert in the newspaper and I was very into clairvoyancy at the time. I still am. I believe there are people who can see things that ordinary people can't...

Anyway, I went to an old office block in Woodstock and walked up to the Professor's room. My mother would've freaked if she'd known. "Good Jewish girls shouldn't go running around trying to tell the future," she'd have said. But I was 16 and I knew better! I was already a regular at the Gypsy caravans.

The professor was sitting at an old Formica table in a cramped space, with stacks of tattered books all around. He acknowledged me with a wave of his hand, but didn't get up or say anything. He just took a good look at me, and then started typing furiously on his old typewriter. Then he yanked the piece of paper from the typewriter and handed it over to me. And I left. That was it.

Outside on the street, I read over what he had typed. There were four clear lines which stood out:

...M.L. loves you and I feel is future husband...

...You will have four children...

...You will travel all over the world...

...And you will win a lottery.

Well, ever since I had married M.L. and had indeed given birth to four children, I regarded this prophecy as gospel. So I tried to buy lottery tickets as often as I could. But we didn't have a lottery in South Africa yet, so Nick, our friend in Lime Acres, would ask his parents, who lived in Rhodesia, to buy tickets for me on the Rhodesian lottery. I would send Nick the money and he would give it to his parents. In later years, I played the Lotto in America and then eventually in South Africa. But for many years, Rhodesia was my only hope.

So anyway I wanted to see Nick and Natalie on that holiday in Lime Acres. I remember we went over to their house for dinner and opened a bottle of wine. Or perhaps it was more than just one bottle. Because I landed up telling them about David. I have no idea why. It just came out. Of course, David was never far from my mind and I didn't talk about him. Yes, Max and I would mention him on his birthday each year, but that probably wasn't enough for me. My prayer for him was like a daily mantra. But I had tried to shut my feelings in a neat little box, and I suppose on this occasion, they just slipped out. Plus, I thought Nick and Nat were 'safe' – they weren't Jewish and they were away from our normal community so the secret wouldn't get out. But it probably did something for my soul just to tell somebody!

Talking about that fortune teller, well he also predicted I would travel so I was always looking for chances to go away. I had already been on a tour to Israel which I had loved. But usually we couldn't afford to go much further than Lime Acres! Max knew that I was dying to see the world. So when it was close to our silver wedding anniversary in 1988, I said to him, "What are we doing to do to celebrate our 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary?" And he said, "How do you feel about going to the Greek islands? I've managed to save R8000 and I think we can pull it off."

That was honestly one of the best holidays of my life. We went for six weeks. Flew to Athens and then took the ferries to wherever our hearts desired. My favourite was Santorini, the volcanic island with the most incredible golden sunsets and black dust.

The holiday was a release – I felt so free and adventurous...I even did the unspeakable thing of going topless on a beach called Paradise Island! I had no responsibilities for six whole weeks, except to remember the actual date of our anniversary – the 31<sup>st</sup> of March. And after that day on Paradise Island, I became 'my wife, the stripper!' What a laugh! And what a tan I had! But only to the waist of course...

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*When Lynette and I meet next, it is the middle of the eight-day Jewish festival of Pesach which marks the exodus of the Jewish people from slavery in ancient Egypt. The dietary implications of this festival are complicated, and I arrive to a plate laden with kosher*

*goodies: powdery biscuits made without yeast or wheat; matzah crackers with cheese and jam; sticky round teiglach dripping with ginger syrup; and a pile of soft Sally Williams Nougat marked 'Kosher for Passover.'*

*I don't usually eat when I meet Lynette at her home, but Jewish festivals tend to augment an already-heightened ethnic emphasis on food. During Pesach in particular, you'd be hard pressed to find a single Jewish home without platters of traditional fare on offer in the entrance hall. It is a powerful annual reminder of freedom from persecution.*

My father died after living with Parkinson's for five years. He was 72.

I felt lost for a long time afterwards. Sure, he hadn't been himself for the past few years, but I still couldn't imagine my life without him. I missed him all the time, but even more so at *simchas* which I wished he could share. Like when Lara announced her engagement to her boyfriend Sean Martin. She was the first of my children to get married and I experienced the same excitement that I imagine my father must have felt at my wedding. Lara's was like a fairytale, at the Cape Sun nightclub. A small wedding. But beautiful. I wish my father could have lived to see it. I wish he could have lived to see a lot of things...

Colin got married not long after – to Judy, the most wonderful girl. They both worked for the same company. Their son Michael was our first-born grandchild. But they lived in Pretoria and it was hard having them far away.

So of course it broke my heart when Lara left too. She and Sean emigrated to America where Sean's parents lived. He was offered a job there and they moved to Los Angeles. I was devastated.

I went to visit them a few months after they left and I was bowled over by how civilised everything was! I loved the place. The systems worked. There was excellent customer service. Everything was available...I just thought America was great. I also went to Miami, New Orleans, New York, and to Seattle to visit my niece Gail.

I visited Lara every year after that, until she gave birth to her daughter Micaela. Then I stayed for a month! Micaela was a difficult baby. She had colic and cried a lot. But she was gorgeous. And she was my granddaughter! You can imagine how loathe I was to leave.

But at least I still had Jonny at home. He was studying at UCT, doing a business degree, finishing up what Max had once started. And Colin was in Pretoria. We were spread out all over the globe. Like so many South African families today...

Soon though, I got lucky because Colin and Judy decided to move back to Cape Town. We took it in turns to make Shabbat and we had lunch together every Sunday. Once again, there were young kids in the house and things took on a new meaning. We became more like friends than anything.

As for my daughter on the other side of the Atlantic, things were difficult and she and Sean got divorced after a few years. For some reason, I couldn't bring myself to tell my mother about it. I kept it hidden from her for ages. I didn't want to upset her, and I think some part of me didn't want her to suffer any more scandal. Divorce was commonplace for the new generation, but not for hers. So I simply kept quiet about it for months. But with my life's experience, I've developed an intolerance for secrets, so eventually I came out with it. I took her aside one day and said straight out, "Mom, Lara is divorced." She looked at me for a few moments, shrugged and said: "I'm pleased to hear that. I never liked him anyway." That's my mother all right – you could never be entirely sure what she was thinking.

The year of the millennium was not a good one for the family.

One morning I got a call from my sister Jennifer who was nearly hysterical. The supervisor of my mother's building used to buzz the older residents' flats every morning to check on them. That morning, she had not been able to get a response from my mother, and she called Jennifer. Jenny had a key to the flat so she went over to check. She phoned me from there in a state.

Jenny had found my mother on the floor next to the bed, collapsed. I was to call Solly Lison immediately. My mother was semi-lucid, but Jenny was worried that she had had a stroke. She told me to stay by the phone.

I got another call from her about half an hour later to say that they were taking my mother to the Cape MediClinic. My sister Maureen and I went to meet them there.

I had that same feeling of terror as when I'd received the call about my father. And the reality was equally frightening. My mother was really out of it. She couldn't talk properly and

was very confused. The doctor confirmed that she had had a stroke and would be in hospital for some time. After that, she would probably need full-time care.

What followed was the daily trauma of hospital visits, watching my mother struggle with having lost the use of one arm and one leg. She was mentally alert and knew what was going on but there were days when she was confused. The doctor recommended that she be placed in an aged home where she would receive 24-hour care and mental stimulation. In fact, my mother did want to go to Highlands House – the Jewish aged home. Her sister, my Auntie Milly, was there and she wanted to join her. The two of them were very close and Auntie Milly was a great friend and support to me personally. But we simply couldn't afford Highlands House. Even with all of us contributing, it was still too expensive.

Maureen's husband at the time (now her ex-husband) was renovating his flat which had a small flatlet. He offered to accommodate my mother, rent-free – all we would need to cover would be her general living expenses and day/night nurses. This was a generous, and much more affordable solution, so we moved her there.

Unfortunately, my relationship with Maureen took some strain over this time. I was not working and the situation was financially draining. I was looking for another job, but in the meantime, I had to borrow money from Jonathan who by then was living and working in London. It was awkward. But Maureen and I had terrible disagreements about things and a rift began to form. My mother was aware of the tension but she didn't want to say anything to Maureen who was really fantastic to her. Maureen catered for my mother's every whim, really saw to it that she had everything she needed. But my mother didn't want to upset her, so she just kept quiet. We didn't resolve things. It's such a pity...

At that time, we had another tragedy. Sean, Lara's ex-husband, passed away unexpectedly. He and Lara were already separated, but it came as a terrible shock to her. She was all alone in Los Angeles, with fantastic friends but without any family to help her, and she was devastated. I was terribly worried about Lara's daughter Micaela and how she would handle the situation. Already she was very confused about where her daddy was, and she had broken my heart by saying: "If G-d took daddy, he can take Mommy too."



My mother deteriorated steadily. It's a very difficult thing, to watch someone you love decline with age. Although it's part of the natural order of things, it feels terribly unnatural.

My mother wasn't one for pity. I hadn't thought she ever needed it. But after her stroke, it was difficult for her to do things on her own and I found it upsetting to see her like that. It had been the same with my father.

She was ill for about two years. I didn't want her to suffer or be uncomfortable, but I didn't want to give her up. Losing a parent is like losing one of your roots in the ground. You feel abandoned. Your whole life, they are the reference point against which you measure so much else. When you lose them, you feel misplaced. Even if you expected it...

Amongst the many important dates which I observe in my life, there are a few that really stand out. David's birthday on the 9<sup>th</sup> of August – I observe it every year still. My anniversary on the 31<sup>st</sup> of March – it was the day I started a new life. And the 4<sup>th</sup> of January 2002. Because that was the day my mother died.



Antony, Rene, Yael & Marc

### A SCRAP OF PAPER

**O**ne of the first similarities between Antony and Lynette that strikes me is their cooperativeness. Both express an unbridled willingness to share information with me: Lynette, despite the magnitude of her secret and the scant few who know it; Antony, despite the very public telling of a very private story.

Antony sent me copies of two letters – documents which were to have a lasting and life-altering impact on him. Although he could not know it when he received them, these letters became the implement which set his relationship with Lynette in motion:

9<sup>th</sup> August 1982

My dear Antony

My dear son

My dear friend who becomes a man today

I wanted to write you a letter about being a man and what that means in a fuller sense. I wanted to tell you that gentleness is the quality most admired in men, but then I remembered how gentle you are. So I decided to write something else. It's just this:

I want you to know that whatever you do or wherever you go, you walk with my blessings and love. I will always bless the day you were born. I thought I knew about love and the boundaries of love, until I raised you. Before these past 21 years, I knew nothing of love – that has been your gift to me.

Happy Birthday.

Mom

My dearest Antony

The first time I travelled in an aeroplane was on the day that we flew to Cape Town to bring you home with us. I had never liked the idea of flying but that journey marked a turning point and was to become the most important journey of my life. Your mother and I undertook the responsibility of caring for you and bringing you to manhood.

During the process there developed a bond of love and understanding between us, a bond which is so dear to me that words cannot adequately describe my feelings. Your mother has explained these feelings so beautifully in her letter, and every word that she has written, every thought that she has expressed, are mine as well.

My wish for you is that you use the wonderful abilities with which you have been blessed to create a satisfying and meaningful life – my great pleasure will be in the knowledge that I have been able to help and guide you.

Wishing you a wonderful 21<sup>st</sup> birthday.

Your loving father.

Antony:

During my speech at my son's *Bris*, I read out the two letters that my parents wrote on my 21<sup>st</sup> birthday. I knew that they were watching us from above and I wanted them to know that we would strive to raise Marc with the same unconditional love and warmth that I was raised with. I read those letters in their honour.

Those were the most emotional words my parents had ever put down. Even though we were very close, they hadn't ever expressed themselves quite like that before and I never forgot it. The idea of reading the letters at Marc's *Bris* just seemed right. So when the idea came to me, I started searching for the letters in a folder that I had brought with me from South Africa when I had gone to bury my Dad. I had not looked at that folder since his death. And it was while searching for the letters that I came across a scrap of paper that I had never seen before. The paper was partially torn and there were two names written on it in my Dad's barely legible scrawl. Two names and a date...

At first I had no idea what these names meant. But for some reason, I didn't discard that piece of paper. Because somewhere, at the back of my head, a bell was ringing.

At the time, I was about to turn 40, and anyone who knew me knew that for those 40 years I had expressed no interest in finding out about my biological parents. I was content with who I was, and the parents I had grown up with; the idea of biological parents had never been a big deal to me.

But I was a changed man after going through the process of adopting my son. I had met my son's birth-mother. She had wanted a better life for her child and he was a blessing to us. I now knew that someone had given that same gift to my parents 40 years ago. And now I simply had to know who that person was...

I took out the scrap of paper again and examined the names. Then I took out a pile of documents that the Canadian agency had used to process my American visa, all those years back. I remembered getting a call from the agency to discuss a birth certificate that they had procured. They had called to verify some details which differed from my application. I had applied as Antony Egnal...But the name on the birth certificate was 'David Zinn'.

That had been my first inkling of my biological roots, but I had filed the details away – physically, in the back of a cupboard, and mentally, at the back of my brain. David Zinn. I pulled out the scrap of paper from my father's files and checked it. There, scribbled in my father's handwriting, fading away on a yellowing scrap was the name of the person who had to be my birth-mother: Lynette Zinn.

I stared at that piece of paper for ages. There was another name on the paper but it didn't ring a bell: Max Langman. Who could that be? I racked my brain for any other forgotten memories. I vaguely remembered being told that my biological parents were married and had three kids. I believed that I had been the fourth child born and they couldn't afford to raise me. That was why they had placed me for adoption. Other than that, there was nothing. So who was Max Langman? Was he my father? Or the adoption agent? Perhaps he was just another name that happened to be scribbled on the same piece of paper.

For an instant, I regretted not pressing my parents for more details. But this had never been an issue for me before and the subject was hardly ever discussed. Even after my father's death, when I had gone back to South Africa to sort out the affairs, there was the chance to look through a whole lot of legal documents that probably contained more information about my birth. But I was not interested then. Now, all I had was a scrap of paper and some dusty clues.

I anticipated a laborious, unsuccessful search – the type I had heard of in the United States where sons and daughters spend months, if not years, following leads and drawing blanks. But I was determined. I had to find the person who had given me to my parents. I had to thank her. That was all. I just wanted to let her know how grateful I was for the life I had been able to live.

The first person I called was my sister. Some years before, she had found her biological mother and I knew she could tell me where to start. She gave me the name of the adoption agency in Cape Town. To my surprise, things unfolded quickly. In South Africa it's not like it is here in the States with hundreds of private and state-run adoption agencies; fortunately there was only one agency at the time handling all the adoptions in Cape Town.

I called the agency as soon as I had the number. The social worker faxed me some documentation that I had to read and sign to say that I was of sound mind and spirit, and that this was something I had thought about and wanted to proceed with. She made sure that I had had adequate counselling and wanted to know why I had chosen to pursue the inquiry. She cautioned me early on, warning me that things may not go my way. My birth-mother may have moved or become untraceable. My birth-mother may not still be alive. My birth-mother had the right of first refusal and may want nothing to do with me. I explained to the social worker that I had made a success of my life and felt that I was in a position to handle whatever came my way. I was not looking for answers. I just wanted to thank my birth-mother for giving me a wonderful life, and for giving my parents a gift. If I was able to do that, great. If not, I would just get on with my life....

*Antony's mention of his sister Mandy is his first in a while and this joint experience of searching for biological parents is an important tie. The absence of Mandy in Antony's description of his adult life is glaring; even this recent mention is fleeting and shallow, as if the opportunity for alliance, even at this most critical of junctures, was lost.*

*I resolve to re-connect with Mandy. In truth, I had almost forgotten about her, perhaps because I've taken my cue from Antony's own lukewarm connection with her.*

*It takes a good few days before I am able to find Mandy on MSN Messenger and request a telephonic interview. She has no phone line at home and suggests using Skype – the latest and greatest of internet telephony sites. I am wary of yet another medium of the digital age, but I handle Mandy as tentatively as I would bone china, for fear of scaring her away. So I agree, and simply work through the crackling, in-and-out fade of the online voice connection, and the barely-legible notes I scribble while manipulating the headset and volume controls.*

*The voice of Mandy Egnal is gruff and sexy, a perfect match for the come-hither photograph I saw of her during our first interaction. She has a strong Israeli accent, signalling her complete assimilation into Israeli society. The South African inflections are still there, but they've dulled in the 12 years since she left the country, rubbed away by the eagerness of the*

*emigrant who just wants to fit in. But if you listen closely, you'll hear the odd "ja", "just now" or lazy 'i'. She is instantly warm and friendly, but with a dismissiveness which blockades the issues she does not want to discuss. She seems to have become the quintessential Israeli sabra – the desert prickly pear fruit which has come to characterise the defensive Israeli spirit: hard and thorny on the outside, soft on the inside. A veneer slots into place whenever she needs to raise her defences on sensitive issues – it comes across as a flippancy with rough edges, sometimes punctuated by swear words or what I imagine to be a wave of her hand or flip of her head. She strikes me as a no-nonsense person, one who does rather than one who talks about doing. I appreciate her authenticity.*

Mandy:

Antony and I are a total contrast. We were totally different growing up, and our outlook on adoption was totally different. For Antony, it was not an issue to meet his biological mother. He never wanted to know about her. But I guess for women it's different. Maybe because we are mothers ourselves. I always wanted to know who my biological parents were. And when I had my first daughter, then I really wanted to know: who is this bitch who gave me up? I had a lot of anger then. Less so now, although I still feel anger. But then, I was really angry.

I was 24 when I contacted my biological mother. It was after my parents had both died. I never did anything about it while they were alive...

I met her by pure chance. My neighbour's sister was working at the Adoption Centre in Cape Town...

Like Antony, I was born in Cape Town, and I moved back there for a year before I left for Israel the final time. You see I lived in Israel twice. The first time was for 3 years, then I moved back to Cape Town, and then back to Israel after my divorce. I got married to a kibbutznik who adored my parents. Who wouldn't? Selma was such an alive woman, and such a devoted mother and wife. I was married for eight years, lived with someone for 12 years, and I've been alone for three years.

Anyway, in 1991, my neighbour's sister said to me that she will go get my file. She was reading through the file and said: "Oh my god, I know this family Mandy!" She said she was friendly with my biological mother's brother (who had died in an accident). She picked up the phone and found my mother in an instant! It was all bizarre. I mean, how many adopted kids actually find their parents – never mind so easily?! I don't know if Antony told you, but we have a cousin who is also adopted (she is now 48): she never found her parents.

At first we wrote to each other. We didn't get in contact through the social workers, we just did it ourselves. And we both wanted to meet. She is also a mother of three.

So I flew to Johannesburg to meet her. She had been living under my nose all this time! We met at Sandton Shopping Centre. She had never told her husband or her kids about me. No one knew about me besides her mother and father. They were a Jewish family who came from George. When she was young, she had fallen in love with a pilot who was not Jewish, and her parents packed her off to some Jewish organisation to have the baby. She never saw me, never knew a thing about me...Shame...

I met her. I met her and her whole family: my brothers, my sister. But she didn't acknowledge who I was. She introduced me as her friend's daughter. She never told them the truth – still hasn't, not to this very day. None of them know who I really am. It made me feel horrible to be introduced as that. I mean, I spent a lot of time with them! I flew to Johannesburg often to see them. And my sister spent three weeks with me in Cape Town!

*But how did she pull that off? What friend of hers? How did she explain it properly?*

Who knows? *Bitter laugh.* That's her problem...

I wanted more, but I never got it. After I moved to Israel, I stopped communicating with her. She had made me promise that I wouldn't look for my biological father. She didn't want me to find him as he had never known about her pregnancy.

But a few years ago, I decided that I needed to know who he was. I didn't care that she didn't want me to. I needed to know. So I contacted someone by the name of Eileen Jordaan. She was in charge of the adoption archives in Cape Town. She wasn't willing to help me



because my father never even knew I existed. She gave me some bullshit about “humane confidentiality” or something. It’s so wrong: he has a right to know about me!

After getting nowhere for a while, I called her one day and read her a passage entitled “The rights of a child.” And one of those rights is to know who your parents are. I said to her: “Either you help me, or I will do DNA tests.” I had to get to her, and to my father, in an aggressive way. Eventually, she agreed to hire a private detective – for R350! What a joke! All it took was a measly R350! The detective’s name was Van de Whatever...totally Afrikaans. And he had something to work on because they had my father’s ID number. My mother had given his name as the father, and they had his ID. My father’s name was Michael.

The private detective traced him to Durban, and then to Johannesburg – he had sold his business in Durban and moved. We had a phone number where he used to work and I was the one who called. At first they wouldn’t give me any of his details but after enough convincing, I got them to give me his cell number.

Eileen contacted him. He told Eileen that he didn’t remember any woman with my birth mother’s name. He knew nothing about a pregnancy even.

You know, my birth mother told me that in this day and age, she wouldn’t have given me up. At that time, she was 16, the guy was non-Jewish, times were different. It would have been a huge scandal for her. I suppose you have to think about her too, hey. Anyway, I’m happy she gave me up. Selma and Joe were two incredible people. Now that I’m older, I realise just how lucky I was.

Sorry, I’m jumping around a lot. Anyway, back to my father.

Eileen called me back after she spoke to him and said: “There’s nothing I can do now. He has no idea who your mother is. We’re talking 40 years ago! He can’t remember.”

So what did I do? I called him myself. I didn’t tell him who I was but I repeated the details about my birth mother to try and jog his memory.

He wasn’t very happy. He said to me: “Who are you people who keep asking me all these questions?”

So I said: "40 years ago, you met a girl. You were in the Air Force." I gave him his ID number and I gave him his pilot number. He must have flipped when I gave him those details! I had checked the Internet and I gave him all the details about his life that I had found.

"Listen," I said, "I'm going to be very straight with you...You had a child with this woman."

"This woman didn't get pregnant from me!" he said. "I am a minister!"

"Ok," I responded, "but when you were in the Air Force, you weren't."

And then the strangest thing happened. He started giggling.

I jolted his memory a little more and the fog seemed to clear: "Oh yes," he said, "I vaguely remember that girl."

"Well that girl had a baby," I said. "But that baby isn't such a baby anymore. She's a mother of three children herself, and she wants to meet you."

"But I don't have grandchildren. I can't have grandchildren!"

"Yes you do! You have three!"

He was stunned at that thought. I gave him some time to process what I'd told him, and then I got to the heart of it: "I just want to tell you, Michael...I am that baby!"

I don't know what I was expecting from him, but I didn't get much. He told me that he had only just moved to Johannesburg and needed time to get himself sorted out. He took my email address and said that as soon as he got settled, he would email me.

I never heard from him again.

I tried calling him again a few times. Once, his wife swore at me. "What do you want from us?" she shouted. So I left it at that. Now, if I want to meet him, I'll have to come to Johannesburg and try to find him. But at the moment, I have no interest in a relationship. Three years ago, it was different. Something personal happened to me in Israel and it became a huge thing for me to find these parents of mine. I was alone and desperate, looking for something that wasn't there, looking for love that only a mother can give...but she was not willing, and neither was he.

I used to write my biological mother these crappy emails – they were nasty. I'd ask: "How can you look at yourself in the mirror?" I couldn't believe that she didn't want to acknowledge me. I was very angry. I've calmed down about it, but I'm sure that, in time, I'll get angry again.

Now I've realised that no-one can replace Selma. I've realised that. All that other woman did was bear me. But my whole aspect on life I got from my mother and father, from Selma and Joe.

You see, actually being adopted was never a big deal. I just remember that it was part of our lives. Our mother told us when we were really young, before we could fully understand. And she always told us we were very special. When I was born, I had dislocated hips, and they didn't want to give me up for adoption (they didn't think I would ever walk, so they didn't want to give that burden over to adoptive parents). The lady in charge of my case – I can't remember her name; she wrote a book on adoption – anyway, during the time of my adoption, she became friendly with my parents, over and above being their social worker. We even met her when we were older! She lived in Cape Town and she was a violinist. She had black hair which she wore in a bun. Anyway, they didn't want to let me go, but my mother put up a big fight and told them she could handle my condition. She would literally teach me to walk. Apparently, when she walked into the room and saw me for the first time, I started crying. She took me in her arms and that was that. She always told me I was special.

Selma never let go of the apron strings. For either of us kids. Joe, well, he was on another planet, but anyway. Ant had a better relationship with him than I did. He communicated with him on an intellectual level, which was where Joe was comfortable. It didn't really work for me...

And then I have this brother called Antony... I have a lot of problems with him...

*She has dropped briefly into a sarcastic tone and I try to probe further.*

Well I was never that close to him. He used to beat the shit out of me...and father me. He still tries to father me...that's just Antony. The man with all the morals.

*Her comments make me wonder if her rift with Antony has a source, or if it is indeed merely a factor of their differing personalities. But when pushed, Mandy is only prepared to say:*

Antony is a guy with very high morals. He's a great father. And an exceptional husband. All round, he's a pretty great person. But he's very intense. Whatever he does, he does with passion. And he's very smart.

I saw him a couple of years ago. It wasn't easy. He's got his life. He's got to live with what he lives with. That's his problem.

We are so different. And we were two such different kids! Obviously that happens in cases like ours, with both of us being adopted. They say blood is thicker than water – maybe it's true, I don't know. But our differences have got a lot to do with Antony, with who he is. Me? I'm Selma's daughter. Totally. I wish she was around now for my daughters and son. My kids have really missed out by not knowing her. If I could give my kids 20% of what she gave me, I'd be happy...

*Mandy's restrained, though intriguing picture of her brother and his family is awash with barely-there hints of discord – as if somewhere beneath the history of the Egnal family lies a Rosetta Stone which decodes their cracks. To hear Antony tell it, the fractures are hairline only, and hardly worth mentioning. But Mandy's story is different, in every way.*

*She didn't say much about René and I wonder about their relationship. There doesn't seem to be one to speak of, and they have hardly spent any time together over the years. I'd like to get René's take on things. And I wonder about the effect on his family of Antony's newly kindled motivation to find his biological mother, particularly after years without any such craving. René had partnered him on everything from graduation to child-rearing, and now had the front-row view of the act that was to irrevocably change his life. I wonder how she reacted to his search and understood his new impulse. Often, it is the outsider who knows us better than we know ourselves...*

*I contact René Egnal via email. She is friendly and obliging, answering as many of my questions as she can find time to tackle. But I sense a reservation in her. Unlike Antony, who*

*spends hours in communication with me, René seems to hold back slightly. Her tone is more formal and her expressions contained.*

*I wonder if René is trying to shield Antony.*

René:

Through the years, we had obviously discussed the fact that Antony was adopted, but it was never a major topic. He consistently stated that he loved the parents that raised him and never questioned his adoption. He seemed to be totally comfortable with it and had an amazing relationship with his parents, especially his mom. She loved him like he was some sort of god. And he was the type of child that gave them only pleasure; he was a high achiever who thrived on seeing his parents get great joy from him. I think that because of this close relationship with his parents, and because he always sought to do the right thing by them and make them proud, he never felt the need to look for his biological parents. And I didn't question that. Antony is the type of person who is very much in control of his life and his emotions. He says what he thinks and feels, and no more. There was no reason to doubt him.

After we went through the amazing, emotionally-charged ordeal of adopting our son, and had met with many potential and actual birth-mothers, we realised how hard it was for them to go through this process and to choose adoptive parents they could entrust with their baby. So I was not surprised when that process triggered Ant's desire to look for his biological mom. He wanted to tell her that she had done the right thing by placing him in such a wonderful home, and he wanted to let her know what a gift she gave to his adoptive parents. He also wanted her to know that he was fine, healthy and functioning in society. I'd say that his drive to find her was almost entirely unselfish. He didn't want any more from the contact other than to ease his biological mother's conscience.

I, for one, was supportive of the search. I thought it was the healthy thing for Ant to do, whatever his reasons. I never thought about what it would mean for me, or the rest of his family. I knew it was something that he wanted to take care of, and that's enough for me.

At the same time, though, I was the one who was worried about what he was going to find. He had a single purpose, but that was all resting on the assumption that he would actually

find this person and that she would want to talk to him at all. He didn't really know the circumstances of his adoption, other than some brief explanation his parents had given him, and I did feel cautious about him going out there and getting disappointed. But Ant didn't experience that same apprehension. He's the eternal optimist. He knew what he wanted to do and for him, it was a simple matter of doing it...

*It is the most I am able to get from René without jeopardising our contact, and I am distinctly aware that she makes no mention of Mandy. Her sole focus is Antony, her sole motivation is her support for him. Fierce, loyal, fiercely loyal.*

Antony:

The adoption records were all centrally located, so it didn't take the agency long. A few weeks after my first call to them, I got a call back. They had found my birth-mother, Lynette Zinn. And she wanted to make contact with me. "That's excellent," I said, excited.

She told me that Lynette Zinn was 18 or 19 years old when she had me and gave me up for adoption. Almost a year and a half after that, she married my father. They'd been married for 38 years. I had three siblings who knew nothing about me. My father was Max Langman.

So the names on the scrap of paper were indeed connected! But the order of events just didn't make sense. I had always believed that I was the last of the children, that they had all known about me because I was the one they couldn't afford. The social worker's version would make me the first-born...!

I walked around with Lynette Zinn's number in my pocket for weeks. With all the impetus driving this process forward and the efficiency of the search so far, I now couldn't bring myself to simply make the call. I felt nervous and excited and suddenly tongue-tied. It was strange. I had gone from no interest in my biological roots to the brink of making contact...all in a matter of weeks...

When I think about it now, I realise that my decision to search for my birth-mother had been brewing for a while, at least since I had met Leilani – the birth-mother of my son. Of

course I wanted to express my gratitude to Lynette, as I had maintained all along. But there was more to it. Right after Marc was born, René and I had sat with Leilani and she told us things about Marc that only a birth-mother would know; things about his birth-background, his time in utero, her feelings about him...I imagine that that must have planted or watered the seed in my mind – that desire to have some contact with the only person who could know those things about me. I was lucky – I never felt a lack in my life, never felt the incompleteness or the burning questions that I know many adopted kids do feel. For me, the search came late, and for different reasons.

Eventually, two weeks after I received Lynette Zinn's number, I plucked up the courage to make contact. It was a weekend and I had to time my call to take the nine-hour time difference into account. René was sitting with me as I dialled...The phone rang once, twice, three times and then someone picked up. I held my breath..."You have reached the Langmans..." An answering machine! I couldn't believe it. After all that build-up! I put the phone down and jokingly said to my wife, "Hey Ren, do you think I should leave a message? Seriously, what am I meant to say? 'Hi, I'm Antony, we haven't had any contact for 40 years.' Or 'Hi, I'm your long-lost son, David. Just thought I'd drop you a call.'" I mean what do you say to the mother you've never met?

It took me one week longer before I finally found out. On a hot summer's day in Seattle I stood with my finger poised to dial once more, about to make the phone call of a lifetime...



Jonathan, Lara and Colin Langman

## I'VE GOT SOMETHING TO TELL YOU

**I** am surprised when Lynette suggests that we meet in town for our interview. Up to now, public places have been out of bounds. But she seems to be growing with the telling, becoming more comfortable in the folds of the story. She chooses a neutral location where she is unlikely encounter to anyone she knows.

*It's coming up to Easter Friday and the centre of town hums with people getting ready for the long weekend. We have agreed to meet during Lynette's lunch hour at a small bakery near where she works. The traffic is unexpectedly heavy and I'm going to be late.*

*I crawl down Hatfield Street, bumper-to-bumper with the SUV in front. At the red robot, I watch a group of pigeons scrambling for scraps. They are urban birds, hardly bothered by*



*the steady stream of cars and hooters and speeding taxis. I watch them hop up and down the pavement, flitting irreverently onto the bronze head of Boer War General Louis Botha outside Parliament.*

*The robot turns green just as the daily POW! of the Noon Gun fires. The doves titter mildly even as hardened Capetonians jump and check their watches. I'm late.*

*Lynette is already sitting at a corner table when I rush in. The smell of fresh dough has been baked into the walls of this place and rows of richly coloured cupcakes line the counters. Perched high on stands, cakes drip with creamy brown icing and biscuits sparkle with edible glitter. The room feels drenched in chocolate.*

*In the egalitarian spirit of the country, bright signage wishes patrons a belated Happy Easter and Happy Passover. I order a cappuccino and an irresistible pink and white ginger bunny. Lynette is drinking water.*

Lynette:

After Antony's phone-call, Max and I just stared at each other. We had so much to say and yet we were speechless. In all the chaos of my brain, I could fixate on only one thing: "We have to tell the children," I said. "I'm going to start now. I need to do this."

Their reactions were more than I could have hoped for...

*When it comes to the connection with Antony, there is often a rosiness that tints Lynette's telling. Usually I find it heart-warming, testament to the enviably close nature of the family's ties. But sometimes, I find it unreal – almost too good – and I worry that her joy at the outcome, and her penchant for denial as self-defence, may skew her recollections.*

*I find myself wondering if the horse's mouth would concur. So I arrange to interview the siblings in whatever manner I can. I meet Jonny face-to-face during his holiday in Cape Town; the same with Colin who comes over for a brief visit, and Lara via telephone and email.*

*Quite small in stature, Jonathan Langman has a rounded, boyish face which seems wide open to wonder and belies an inner maturity. As we sit down, he happily kicks off his shoes and flops into an armchair. He is pale from long working hours and the grey of the Seattle winter. His accent is flecked with the intonations of years of travel and I notice that he concentrates his full attention on our discussion. I often find that people in conversation wait for their turn to talk rather than engaging meaningfully in what the other person is saying, making dialogue nothing more than a series of selfish monologues. Jonny, however, listens intently and follows the movement of my lips, just as a child might who is learning to speak. But as soon as I am silent and he recognises his cue, I am struck by the sense that Jonny possesses wisdom beyond his years. He thinks before he talks, often enduring long moments of silence to search for the truest answer. And he exhibits the rarest altruistic sensitivity.*

Jonny:

One day while I was living in London, I got a call from my mother. After checking that I had time to talk, she said: "I've got something to tell you." When you hear that, your mind immediately starts to go. My first thought was that my parents were getting a divorce. Then I worried that someone had cancer. But then she continued with something that totally threw me off course. She said: "40 years ago, Daddy and I had a son who we gave up for adoption. The circumstances were complicated – very different from today. But I need to tell you that he has now made contact with us and he lives in America." Her voice was shaking.

I tell you, if I could give you a list of 1000 things I'd have imagined she'd tell me that day, the story about Antony would not have been on it.

I could hear my mother was very emotional. She even said: "Please don't judge me. I hope that after you hear this, you won't love me any less..."

My immediate reaction was to reassure her. This was the most vulnerable position she could ever be in: for 40 years she had kept a deep, dark secret pertaining to motherhood – the very essence of her – and I knew that she must be questioning herself. So it was important for me to tell her: "You've been a fantastic mother. I don't judge you. I think you're wonderful."

She told me she had made a promise that if G-d ever granted her more children after Antony, she would be the best mother possible. "You've fulfilled that promise," I said.

Unfortunately, the damn cell phone I was on kept cutting out and we had to break the conversation into lots of pieces. I tried to find out a bit more, but to tell you the truth, I wasn't really interested in the details about the past. Still to this day, I'm not really interested. I haven't ever asked my mother about the nitty gritty of what happened. I know the gist of it and that's enough. I see this as a wound for my mother and I don't want to dig deeper and make her hurt more.

After that, I just wanted to get in touch with Antony. There was no reticence about it. I saw this as the most incredible thing. I even said to my mom: "People lose children. Children die. You have found a child! It is incredible! I am just so happy for you and Daddy."

I immediately asked for his number and soon called him. For our first conversation, my heart was pounding like crazy! I said to Ant: "We have no history. We only have a future. Family is the most important thing in my life and we have the most amazing opportunity. This is a windfall – an absolute bonus."

And it's true: I don't have a history with him. I didn't place him for adoption. I didn't even know he existed until he was 40 years old! So we had nothing from the past that needed repairing. We just had a future to build.

I have no idea how my mother managed to keep this secret. She is such an emotional person. I completely understand how my father was able to. He just stuck it in a box in his head and sent the elevator down. But my mom! We are very close and we have had long conversations about many a topic. But this one she kept all to herself...I mean, how was she able to be the type of mother she was able to be, with all of this going on inside her? It's amazing...

*Colin Langman is larger than life. Tall and well-built, with shorn hair and a neatly clipped moustache, he has an imposing presence. But he melts as soon as he begins to speak. Although born and bred in Cape Town, he left home for Johannesburg at a young age and brandishes his independence like a badge. At first glance, he has become a 'Jo'burg boytjie' –*

*boisterous and vocal, with the paradoxically lazy drawl of South Africa's most vibrant city. He seems so different to his parents. But within minutes, I realise that Colin exudes a warmth which one hardly associates with the tough exterior of an ex-army man: he is affectionate without boundary, squeezing his mother's hand when she walks past and hugging me goodbye when I leave. He is expressive without inhibition and his company is unexpectedly intoxicating.*

Colin:

I remember, it was a Shabbat evening in Cape Town. Judy and I were back living there then. We had just returned from a week away.

Everything was normal to start off with. After supper we went for coffee in the lounge and were talking basics. You know, the normal huck huck huck.

I went to make coffee and when I came back, my mother's eyes were all watery. She said: "There's something I must tell you."

"Hit me," I said. And she told me to sit down.

At that point, there were so many thoughts going through my head. The first one was 'It's Bobba'. My grandmother, Tilly, had been very ill so maybe it was her. But no. My mother would have phoned us immediately about that – she wouldn't have waited to tell us.

My next thought was that it was about my father. Max is diabetic so I wondered if they had found a more serious problem. Did he have cancer?

By that stage, my mother had tears rolling down her face. She said – and I'll never forget her words – "40 years ago, your father and I had a child." And then she sat there.

My wife Judy was sitting opposite me and she was the first to speak. "You're not serious," she said. She honestly thought Lynette was joking.

My immediate reaction was to ask questions. I just pumped them out. Was this child alive today? Did she actually mean that she had an abortion 40 years ago? I mean, I was the oldest – or so I believed. If this child was alive, then it was the most incredible thought. Surely we would have known?

I asked who it was and Lynette said: "His name is Antony. He is a physician. He is alive and well, living in America."

'No ways,' I thought. At that moment, all I could think of was: 'I want to meet him!' I just felt overwhelmed with excitement. It was the most incredible thing: that we had another brother that we had known nothing about for 40 years!

Then the reality started to hit me. "Why didn't you tell us?" I asked. I didn't worry about her keeping a secret from us but I just thought, 'Shit Ma – 40 years! How did you walk around knowing this and saying nothing?' I thought of all the movies we had watched about adoption and kids getting reunited with their parents and I thought: 'Every movie you watched must have killed you.'

Everything was just gushing out of me. All in the space of ten minutes. And Lynette was bawling. So I just said to her: "I need you to know that even though you shared this with us, I don't love you any less. I'm only happy to hear that this bloke is alive!"

You see, we've always been that type of family. Close. Loving. I wanted them to know that nothing had changed with how I felt. Me? I was like an Electrolux. I just wanted information. Gimme something! Address, photograph, anything!

Max obviously reacted differently. He wears a shield. Doesn't show emotions. We've never really connected on that level and he never really interferes. For example, if you're going through a really emotional goodbye at the airport, and everyone is peeing their eyes out, Max will say something like, "Bugger off already". He covers up. But I think this must have been really really hard for him. In true Max style, he brushed off the emotion by saying: "Don't worry – this isn't an Oprah Winfrey story." Just to break the ice.

I did ask my mother why she never told us. And her response made sense: "What would I have told you?" she asked. "I didn't know who he was, where he was, if he was still living. I don't think it would have been fair to tell you. Would you like to walk around knowing that you have a brother but know nothing about him? That's what I lived with and it wouldn't have been right to make you live with it too."

If Antony had never made that call, Lynette would probably never have told us. She didn't think it was fair. Personally, I agree.

*Lynette once described her daughter Lara as someone who 'just bubbles.' This simplest of descriptions is the most fitting. Even though my interaction with Lara is mediated by cyberspace and telephone lines, her natural effervescence is pervasive. Her emails are filled with exclamation marks, interspersed with smiley faces and winking emoticons. She is the type of person who asks how you are and genuinely wants to know the answer. After just a few interactions, I feel as if we are old friends already. It's no wonder that her success as a school teacher is legendary.*

*Lara has a lot of her mother in her. She is kind and firm, a stoic who can tolerate inability or inefficiency in anyone but herself. She has endured the extremes of personal loss but would never allow it to dilute her approachability. Self-discipline is her amanuensis.*

Lara:

I'll never forget the day Mom called to tell me about Antony. She called on Sunday around 12:00pm. The minute I heard it was her, I was a little concerned as I always speak to her on a Saturday, and had spoken to her the day before. It is rare that we talk two days in a row due to the long distance costs. When Mom told me to sit down because she had something she wanted to tell me, it was amazing how a million things flashed through my mind in about ten seconds – my dad had had a heart attack, my mom had cancer, yes, a million things flashed through my mind, but never in a million years would I have guessed what she was going to say. I sat down and she started to tell me this story about her being pregnant at 17, with my dad, having a baby, and giving it up for adoption...As Mom was talking, the whole thing felt very surreal – I was sure she was going to say "April Fools" except it was not April. I remember being completely amazed and shocked, but the thing I remember most was that I just kept thinking how sad it was that this person had missed out on the opportunity to have my mom as his mom. That was what stuck with me the most – the injustice of it.

I wanted to know why she had not told me for all these years. I felt bad that this was something she had to carry on her own all this time. I consider my mom to be one of my best

friends and we are really close – I could not fathom that she would not have told me something like this. Growing up I had always begged my mom to have another child – I really wanted a sister! When she told me about Antony, I think I jokingly said something along the lines of, “Couldn’t you have had a girl?”

I cannot begin to imagine what she must have gone through. And that she then went on to have three more children, and was and is such an incredible mom. When she told me that Sunday she mentioned that she was nervous I would judge her or feel less of her. No way could that ever happen – I just wanted to protect her and let her know it would all be ok.

Lynette:

Each of the kids, independently, had the same, selfless reaction. And they all couldn’t wait to get in touch with Antony. In fact, the night after Antony first made contact, the phone rang and it was him again. “After 40 years, I don’t think two nights in a row is too much, do you?” he asked.

I was delighted to hear his voice and told him that I’d given his number to the kids. He was looking forward to talking to them.

We chatted easily and all through the conversation I kept thinking, ‘This is my son I’m talking to...David.’

Of all the kids, I was most worried about telling Colin. He had always regarded himself as the oldest, the first-born. He was also the first person I told face to face, and I was afraid that we wouldn’t be able to hide behind the safety of the telephone. But he was as loving and supportive as the others were.

The kids had a million questions – some of which I could answer but many of which I couldn’t. I felt a huge sense of relief that they had taken it so well. Still...It was early days and everything was fresh – the news hadn’t sunk in properly. What would the repercussions be later on...?

After telling the kids, next I had to tell my sister Jennifer. We are extremely close and since she had been around at the time of my pregnancy with Antony, I couldn't imagine what she would say.

I waited for about a week, plucking up the courage. I was hopeful after my children's reactions, but after the initial momentum to tell them the truth, I was suddenly held back by fear again. Then one day, a week later, I just knew I had to do it.

We met at a small coffee shop in Sea Point which was empty and out of the way. I sat down and ordered a filter coffee, aware of the questioning in Jenny's eyes. I could almost feel her fear. So I didn't delay. I told her the full story. More than I'd told my kids...I gave her all the details.

She sat there, speechless, until I had finished. My sister – she's never speechless! That's how shocked she was.

Eyes wide, she eventually breathed out, "I can't believe this!" And then the questions started mounting. "How come I didn't know? I was there! Who else knows?"

"Hardly anybody," I told her. "I've only just told the children. He only just made contact. I wanted you to know before you went away."

I could see her brain working overtime, so I quickly stepped in. "Please, Jen, don't tell anyone. In fact, I'd appreciate it if you didn't even tell Milton for the time being. I know he's your husband, but I just can't deal with everybody knowing right now. I don't want this to get out until I've dealt with it properly. You know how Cape Town is."

Loyal as she is, my sister didn't breathe a word to a soul. And for me, it slowly became a bit easier. I was almost getting used to telling the story. Up to now, I hadn't had a single negative response. No-one was judging me or rejecting me. Everyone had accepted the truth only with love and support. But, I reminded myself, this was my family. What would happen when the rest of the Cape Town Jewish community found out? Would I be able to stand up to the shame of having had a child out of wedlock, of giving him away, of the truth of my past...?

I came home from meeting Jenny and said to Max, "I've told everyone I want to tell at this stage. This was your baby too. I'll leave it to you to tell your sister and brother."



So Max called his sister Rae who lives in Israel and, without beating about the bush, said, "You have another nephew."

"Why?" she said, "Who's had a baby?"

"Lynette and I. 40 years ago."

Rae was so overwhelmed that she had to sit down. She could not understand how she never knew – we spent most Sunday afternoons in their home. "I don't remember anything out of the ordinary!" she insisted. But she was over the moon for us.

That night, she kept calling. She just couldn't stop thinking about this, and kept finding new questions to ask. She became obsessed with the story. But what got to her the most was the fact that Antony's son is called Marc. Because just a few months prior, Rae had tragically lost her own son...a son called Mark.

Almost immediately after Antony first made contact, we started emailing each other regularly. And once a week, we'd talk on the telephone. It was very important for me to tell him that we were ecstatic to have this contact and would never expect to take the place of the people who raised him.

Soon, he sent me the portfolio that he and René had put together when adopting Marc. It was a synopsis of their lives and I memorised every detail. He also sent photographs of the kids. I pointed out to him that we didn't know what *he* looked like, so he sent me a photo via email. Because of the time difference, Lara received the photo before I did. She called me first thing the next morning and said, "He is the spitting image of Daddy." Sure enough, when I opened my email, there he was: a young version of Max, and the only one of my children who has my gap between his two front teeth...

On the phone, I had no problem talking to him. We chatted about his kids, his sports – he likes cycling and waterskiing – and his work. I told him about his siblings and our lives in Cape Town. Often, I had to stop myself – I could have spoken to him for hours. At no point was there a pause in the conversation or an uncomfortable silence. I felt like I had known him all his life.

He would phone us every weekend – usually on a Sunday. And he would also speak to Colin, Lara and Jonny regularly. For me, it was almost like having a lover: I was always

excited at the thought of him and could not wait for his calls. I would rush home on Sunday afternoons and wait for the phone to ring – I didn't want to miss it for anything. I lived from weekend to weekend and couldn't get enough.

For Max, it was different. He did talk, but he held back. He still felt awkward making conversation with this virtual stranger. But he put in the effort.

Colin:

Lynette got hold of a photo of Antony through email. I tell you, I opened up that photo and thought 'Whoah!' It was like looking at a duplicate. I saw Max. I saw Jonny. I saw myself without a moustache. I couldn't believe it!

Over the next few months, we started communicating with Antony. I could not wait to talk to him. The first time we spoke (I think he phoned me and Judy called me to the phone), I picked up and said: "Howzit *Boet*." Not 'Antony'. Not 'Ant'. Not 'hello'. But 'howzit brother'.

It was an emotional call. It was like we had known we were brothers for all the years. He was so relaxed and laid back. He has a bit of an American accent, but he still sounds South African. We spent about half an hour on the phone. And it was like he had always been there. In fact, I thought to myself: 'At least you are there. I can't touch you or hug you. But at least you are there.'

One thing that was a bit strange was trying to keep the balance when we talked. For instance, when I spoke of 'Mom', I meant 'our mom'. When he said 'Mom', he didn't mean Lynette, he didn't mean my mom.

Jonny:

Personally, I couldn't wait to meet Antony. I think we all felt like that. No, I don't recall feeling that this was a negative experience at all. I had nothing to lose. I used to kid around with my parents, though. I remember joking with them: "If there are any other skeletons in the closet, tell me now. This is your one amnesty!"

I had thought that maybe Colin would have some negative response because he was the oldest and he found out last. I remember wondering if he would feel upset knowing that he wasn't actually the first-born or something like that. True to form, though, he had no such

response and was as excited as anyone else to make contact with Antony. We all regarded it as another avenue for family contact, although of course there was a risk that it wouldn't develop. That was one of the fears: that all the excitement would lead to disappointment...

Still, that didn't stop us wanting to build a relationship and welcome Antony into the family. People find it strange that none of us felt put out by the idea of him and that we instantly regarded him as a brother. Maybe our reaction is unusual in the realm of adoption stories. But you know, we had been loved unconditionally all our lives. I mean, I don't live in South Africa anymore but I carry my parents' love with me wherever I go and I've always had their support. That makes me a wealthy man.

When I was living in London, it was an eye-opener for me to see the extent of dysfunctional families. I mean, people would moan about taking a train for two hours to go home for Christmas. I'd fly twelve hours in a heartbeat to spend even a single Rosh Hashanah weekend with my family! Max used to joke with us that he was an angel as a father. He's right: I've seen the difference in London. Even in America, where there is a lot of talk about family values, I've seen very few real examples since I've been living there. I know it's a generalisation, but in my opinion, there is a qualitative difference between the values of the typical American family and those of the typical South African family – or the South African Jewish family...The effort my mother put into raising her children was partly due to wanting to regain what she had lost by giving up Antony, but also due to the innate centrality of the family unit in Jewish South African life.

Lynette:

For a while, I didn't tell anyone else. I talked about it with the people who knew and left it at that. I considered counselling but then thought, 'I've come this far alone. I'll deal with this in my own way.' My conversations with Antony were all the therapy I needed.

A few weeks after he made contact, I took another step forward: I told my colleagues at work, who were also my friends. They were the first non-family that I told and I was nervous. But once again, I got only the most loving, joyful response. And that gave me hope. I thought,

'Maybe people will see it in terms of the modern day and age and not judge me'. You see, I wasn't so worried about people looking down on me for giving him up. I was scared of them thinking that I had been loose or had slept around, even though he was Max's child. That was my fear.

Slowly, my courage grew, as did the circle of people who knew. Jenny's husband. Some more friends. Other family members. And of course the story leaked by itself, as 'news' tends to do. I got phone calls from people who simply couldn't resist, all of them happy for me, supportive and caring. We even got invited round for drinks to someone's house to celebrate!

But I still had some paranoia left in me. I imagined that everyone in town suddenly knew. I second-guessed all my conversations, checking for clues that people knew the truth but just weren't saying so. If someone asked, "How are the kids?" I'd immediately think to myself, 'They know. They just don't know how to ask.' I couldn't believe that people weren't judging me...

At the time of Antony's phone call, my mother was still alive. She was ill, but alive – staying in Maureen's home and being looked after by nurses. She had deteriorated terribly and only had occasional moments of lucidity. But I had to tell her.

I went to visit her one afternoon and took the photographs Antony had sent me. Jenny came with me and I sat next to my mom, holding her hand and trying to make conversation. Then I showed her the photograph – the one of Antony with Marc.

"Mommy, do you know who this is?" I asked.

"It looks like Colin," she replied, glancing at it. "And what a cute baby."

"It's not Colin, Mommy. It's Colin's...older brother."

I was in a difficult position. The subject was still incredibly sensitive for me and I just couldn't bring myself to be more specific with her, to say the words 'This is the child I gave up.' The nurses were there all the time, and who knew who they might tell if they overheard?! I tapped my mother's hand and waved the photo. "Mommy, do you understand?"

"He's very handsome," she said, in that slightly dreamy tone of voice. I knew she wasn't entirely there. Then she slipped into her I-don't-want-to-talk-anymore state and stared at the wall behind me.

I tried once more. "Do you see who this is?"

Nothing.

She died some months later and we never discussed it again. I didn't know if she realised that I had found my son. Maybe she knew and simply didn't want to confront it. Maybe she couldn't understand me. I'll never know...

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*When Lynette and I next meet, it is at her office, in the grounds of the synagogue of which she is the director. We arrange to meet before work and I arrive to the hurried exodus of men after morning prayers. The rabbi locks the doors behind him and walks across a courtyard strewn with the tattered debris of autumn leaves. It is May and Cape Town is descending into winter. Mornings are darker and the Southeaster wind, cloak of the mountain, trades places with its seafaring counterpart.*

*I button up my jacket and walk over to an adjacent building. The place smells of egg sandwiches. I climb the stairs to the first floor and follow Lynette's directions to her office where she is already waiting, freshly rouged as ever. The place is neatly ordered with books, papers and photographs. There is Jonny in front of a shiny new car. There is Lara, looking down at a crawling Micaela. There is young Max, smiling widely with a gap-toothed Lynette against the white stucco of Greece. There are Lola and Tilly, frozen in time at the peak of health, her back as ramrod straight as his black top-hat. A desk-full of family...*

Antony and I slowly started getting to know each other. Soon after his first phone call, it was the 9<sup>th</sup> of August – his 40<sup>th</sup> birthday. For the first time, I could just pick up the phone and call him to wish him 'Happy Birthday'! It was such a treat.

In September, Lara arranged to go to Seattle over Thanksgiving. I was nervous, and excited for someone to finally meet him face to face...and I was envious.

Lara called me soon after she got there to say that he was waiting for her with open arms at the airport, and there was an instant bonding. Micaela and Yael – Lara's daughter and

Antony's daughter – held out their hands to one another and remained joined at the hip for the four days. The visit was a huge success.

Even though Max and I communicated often with Antony, it still didn't feel totally real. I wanted to see him with my own eyes. But we simply couldn't afford the trip to America.

That December, Jonathan came home from London for a visit. Of course, we talked about Antony and he said to us: "We need to go to America. We really must visit him and meet him properly. Mom, I can see that this is eating you up. So I've got a plan..."

Jonny knew that I wouldn't go to America unless I could go with the whole family. I just didn't feel it was right to do it any other way. So he generously offered to contribute to the tickets so that we could all go over at the same time. And he felt that we should go for a *Yom Tov*, so Pesach, being the closest one, seemed ideal. I was overwhelmed by my son's generosity. But that's Jonny for you...

I broached the subject of the trip with Antony, quite nervously at first. His response was amazing: "You will all stay here," he said, instantly.

"Antony, there are eight of us!"

"That's fine. I insist."

"That's very kind," I said. "We'll come for two or three days and then go on to Lara. I don't want to impose on you."

"No," he said. "You need at least a week here. You are coming all this way – you need a proper amount of time with us."

For the months leading up to the trip, I swayed between nerves and hopes. I feared having to face him in person. I feared that he would be disappointed with me – even though I'd sent pictures, I didn't know what kind of image he had of me and I feared I wouldn't measure up. I had a fear that I wouldn't handle the whole thing very well. I had a fear that his wife wouldn't like me – after all, they were still strangers to us in many ways. But my biggest fear of all was of upsetting my other children with the way I showed my love and care for him. It would be terrible if they felt overshadowed.

My hopes were that the meeting would be perfect. I felt that we'd built a level of trust in the months we'd been communicating and I hoped everything would continue with that same wonderful warmth. So far, the relationship was surreal, and I wanted it to stay perfect. I wanted it to be everything that I'd imagined it could be. But of course, that made me fear that I'd built it up too much and would fall flat on my face...It was a vicious cycle of expectation and anxiety.

In the week leading up to the trip, I became a nervous wreck who was on a high, if that makes sense. I felt like I was living in a dream. I shopped for presents to take to people I'd never met, like t-shirts and Naartjie outfits for the kids; a set of carved African serving spoons for René; and a t-shirt and sweatshirt for Antony. I shopped and shopped and shopped. And I drove my sister Jenny mad with my questions: "What if he doesn't like me? What if he doesn't like Max? What if we don't all get on? What if it's a strain to be under one roof?"

My mind fixated on questions of 'What if?' There were still very few people that I could express my fears to – only Jenny, Max, Colin and some of my friend-colleagues who I felt really comfortable with. "What is there not to like?" they'd say. "You are warm and loving. What are you so afraid of?"

Rejection! That's what. What happens if I get there and he asks why I did it? What if he looks around at the family and thinks 'look what you took away from me all these years'? What if I can't answer his questions? How will his children address me and Max? Will they call us *Bobba* and *Zeida*? Do I have the right to expect that?

It was in this state of turmoil that I left Cape Town for America. We had decided to spend a week in LA with Lara before going on to Seattle. Colin and Judy had never been to the States and they only had two weeks in total, so we thought we'd do all the touristy things with them in LA: Sea World, Hollywood and so on. But it was such a strain for me. All I wanted was to get to Seattle already. I had such a short fuse and everything got on my nerves during the week in LA. Very out of character for me. Even Antony was feeling the pressure because he phoned me in LA and said, "You guys need to come already. I can't stand this." It was just as hard for him as it was for me. Plus, Lara and Richard, her new boyfriend, had moved out of

their apartment so that we could stay there. They were staying with friends, and I felt bad to put them out like that.

We were due to leave for Seattle at lunchtime on the Saturday. Lara and Richard came to fetch us for the airport and as we met them outside, Lara waved her hand wildly in front of my face. I saw this big rock glistening on her ring finger! I looked at her and burst into tears.

Apparently, when they'd dropped us off after *Shabbat* supper the night before, Richard took a wrong turn on their way back to their friends' house. When Lara pointed it out, he said, "I've booked us into a hotel for the night instead." Then he drove to a nearby hotel and took her up to a room which was filled with flowers and champagne. And he popped the question, saying that he wanted to be an official part of her family before we set off for this momentous reunion trip.

Well, I was just so thrilled. She really deserved the happiness. And I couldn't have asked for a nicer guy for her.

So a very happy party set off for LA airport. But it wasn't long before I was back to my panicking about meeting Antony. On the plane, the kids kept shifting seats to alternate who would sit next to me. While I was sitting next to Lara, the questions started nagging me again:

"How do I greet him" I asked her. "Do I shake his hand or hug him? What do I do?"

She took my hand and said: "I'm telling you, it's going to be fine. Just let it happen."

As we got nearer and nearer to Seattle, I felt like I was going to hyperventilate. I had to calm down if I was to make a good impression...





Antony and Lara

## ONE FACE

**T**hrough the course of my interviews with Antony, he does not lose his even-handed tone. Even as he discusses events of heightened emotional charge, his manner remains mild with a sureness of delivery. At first, I find it somewhat disconcerting. How can anyone undergo such experiences and not have it reflect in the timbre of their voice as they relay and relive their life story?

As I become more familiar with his tale, and his manner of expression, I realise that Antony is one of those rare beasts: an unflappable. He has a self-assurance which is enviable, born of absolute certainty in himself, his past and his path. I sometimes wonder whether he gained such confidence after his reunion with the Langmans, once the questions about his past were answered. But he insists that such questions never plagued him.

*Certainly, as I come to know his story, it becomes unmistakable that Antony's past was one of enduring solidity, the bedrock which supported rather than necessitated his motivation to contact Lynette.*

Antony:

I really did not know what to expect from that first phone call to Lynette. As I keep saying, over and over again, I was not looking for any answers or for long-term commitments and I did not think about the consequences of a whole new family.

I don't remember the exact dialogue but what did strike me then, as it does now, was the ease of the conversation. I initially spoke to Lynette and then Max got on the phone and we had a three-way conversation.

Lynette did mention some things that I remember distinctly. She said that when she placed me for adoption, she promised herself that if G-d gave her any more kids, she would be the best mother to those kids – in part I believe to make up for not having the opportunity to raise me. In addition she said that my siblings, and her and Max's siblings, did not know about me. Max's parents died not knowing and Lynette's parents essentially never spoke about me, except for one occasion some years ago when Lynette's mother broached the subject. The people involved who knew were the doctor and the doctor's nurse.

The other thing that Lynette did tell me is that she remembers the nurse saying that she had met my adoptive parents, a wonderful couple, and that I was going to be raised in Johannesburg. Literally, that's all she knew for 40 years. She also said that she would find the time to tell my siblings, she wanted to do it in person, and she knew that they would be supportive.

I didn't have any idea of what Lynette looked like but she spoke in a soft, gentle, kind voice. Max was a little shorter on the telephone and more to the point, but his delightful sense of humour came across.

Lynette mentioned that they were having a family reunion at the end of the year and, in my naiveté, I thought that that would be the time she would tell my siblings. I didn't realise that now that the story was out and she had waited 40 years for this phone call, it was unlikely she would wait that long to tell them!

After the phone call, I went off to a staff picnic and later that Sunday afternoon, the phone rang. I heard a sweet voice saying, "Hi, I'm Lara. I'm your sister, calling from LA." The call took me completely by surprise! We had a wonderful conversation and agreed that, seeing as we were the closest, we should try to meet in person. During the week following that, I heard from the two brothers within hours of their being told. Every sibling had had exactly the same response when Lynette told them the story. Each in turn said, "Wow that's the most amazing news. Why did you wait so long to tell us? Can I please have the telephone number? I would like to call him." And each time I spoke to them on the phone, I was struck by their warmth and openness, as well as by their support for their mother.

I was a little taken aback when I first received photographs from Lynette within a week of our initial phone call. There were many genetic similarities between myself, Lynette and Max. I immediately noticed Lynette's gap in her two front teeth – which I also have. René, looking at the other siblings, all of whom have straight teeth, joked and said: "Looks like you landed up with the wrong family: all the siblings got braces and you missed out!" In actual fact, none of the siblings did have braces, and my front teeth still have a gap today...

There were also a lot of similarities between the siblings and myself. From a medical point of view, I finally had answers to my questions about genetic background. I was happy to find out that there was no family history of cancer or heart disease although there seemed to be a long family history of diabetes. That was obviously of academic interest to me...

I spoke regularly to Lynette and Max – again, I cannot remember the frequency, whether it was every week or every other week – and a little less frequently to the siblings, although I did hear from every sibling on my birthday, August 9<sup>th</sup>. By this time, we all started toying with the idea of a family reunion – I'm not sure who mentioned coming to Seattle for *Pesach* in April the following year; maybe it was my idea since it seemed a logical time based on what was happening in everybody's lives.

But Lara and I decided not to wait until then. The closest extended weekend was over Thanksgiving in November. We spoke a few times over the following month and mutually agreed that she would come up to Seattle over that weekend.

Lara has such warmth and spontaneous affection – it was evident right from the minute I met her. She was wonderfully open and easy to bring into our immediate family circle. She was not shy to pitch in with making dinner or clearing things from the table which I've come to realise is a strong family trait.

One starts to try to make up for 40 years of lost time...Obviously one can not.

Lara brought many photographs with her and all of us marvelled at how similar Lara and I looked when we were eight, nine or ten years old. My daughter Yael looks as if she could be Lara's own daughter. I also brought out my photographs and we pored over them.

Lara spent ages looking at our wedding album. René noticed that while Lara was looking at one of the more informal shots, she recoiled slightly and seemed to turn a bit white.

When she finished, she put the album down and was quiet for a few minutes. Then she said, "Antony, do you think we could have met by chance in Cape Town? You know, over the years...?" We agreed that we hadn't, nor could we think of anyone we knew in common. Cape Town is a small place but we had obviously moved in different circles. We definitely hadn't met before.

We chatted for a bit longer and then went to have dinner. But something was bugging me, so after dinner I hauled out our wedding video and put it on. We all huddled round the TV. And there, on my own television screen in my own Seattle living room, within five minutes of the video tape rolling...was Lara.

We all started screaming and shouting, pointing at the video. There she was again, and again, and again. She was a guest at the wedding and kept reappearing in the video. She must have appeared in at least 60% of it, frame after frame! I could not believe it.

You see, in the photos, Lara had recognised the distinctive dress she wore that night but didn't want to make a fuss of something that seemed so impossible.

We all sat there, totally stunned.

"But you know what I think is strange?" said Lara. "Surely, if I saw you in person back then, I would have noticed some family resemblance? I mean, you and my Dad are one face..."

"No, I don't think you necessarily would have seen anything," I said. "You never knew I existed. Why would you have noticed me?" If she'd known that her mother had given up a child all those years earlier, then maybe...but not without background knowledge.

We phoned Lynette at some ungodly hour in South Africa. Lara then also called Colin and Jonny to tell them about this amazing coincidence...or stroke of fate. Our wedding had been a small one, with just close friends and family. Only two single guys were invited, one of whom was René's cousin Charles Silbert. Charles happened to invite Lara to be his date that night... Lynette even remembered the incident, remembered waiting up for Lara that night and thinking of Charles as a prospective for her daughter, obviously having no idea that her daughter was attending her own son's wedding.

I just think of my adoptive father's concern every time I dated a Jewish girl, wanting to know what her mother's maiden name was. He was worried that I may land up dating my sister or half-sister. One of the unanswered questions was how much he really knew about my family background and the fact that I actually did have a full-blood sister. His concerns were certainly founded...

Lara:

On the weekend I went to visit Antony, I remember telling friends that I was getting on a plane and flying to Seattle to meet a brother that I did not know.

When we got to Seattle, Antony and his daughter Yael were there to meet us. I felt an instant bond to them both. It was an incredible few days. Antony had asked me to bring some family photos with me and on Friday during the day, I was sitting on a bar stool in the kitchen looking through their pictures. I asked Ren if I could see their wedding album. She explained to me that they had a pretty small wedding and they left South Africa soon after. I was casually looking through their album and I remember thinking to myself that I didn't recognise a soul. I knew the hotel where they were married but none of the people. Then I turned a page and got the fright of my life. I think the colour drained from my face and I began to sweat. I found myself staring at a picture of three women holding hands, dancing. One of the women was me.

My first reaction was that it could not be me. So I sat there playing mind-games with myself and in a few short seconds tried to talk myself out of the possibility. In the picture, I was wearing a dress my mom's sister had given me from her factory and I loved that dress. I knew the photo was of me, but I could not wrap my brain around that. Ren asked me what was wrong and I had a hard time telling her. I said something like, "I think this is me, but it can't be." I also told her not to say anything to Ant because I worried that they would think this was really strange and that I was trying to force a connection that wasn't there.

We didn't say anything else about it for the rest of the day, although I could not stop thinking about it as it really freaked me out. That night close friends of Ant and Ren's came over for Shabbat. Ren showed her friend the picture and mentioned that I thought it could be me. You must know how weird it was to actually have doubted whether this was a picture of me...I know it sounds really strange, and it was. Ren's friend took one look at the picture and said "Of course it's Lara. How can anyone doubt it?" We then tried to figure out how I could possibly have been at the wedding. As I mentioned, they had a small wedding, and Ren mentioned that the only person who brought a date was her cousin Charles Silbert. And then it all fell into place.

Later that Shabbat evening, we got out their wedding video and watched it from beginning to end. The eerie thing is that I am all over the video, dancing right next to Ren and Ant. As Ant said, there is more video footage of me than any other member of his family. We laughed and cried and then called Mom and Dad and laughed and cried some more. It was just surreal...

Antony:

After Lara's visit, I became even more excited to meet the rest of the family. The idea about *Pesach* in April was a popular one and everyone started planning to be there. I looked forward to a happy reunion since I'd felt a very strong connection with Lara and my first meeting with her had been so positive.

Of course, I had some anxieties about how they would view me and what my feelings towards them would be, especially having had such a close relationship with my parents. But I

had no expectations or pre-conceived ideas. I think that was a good form of defence, allowing me to look forward to the meeting without too much of an agenda.

Besides, I knew I could at least relate to them on one level because it was clear that both families had a very strong sense of unity and family life. I may have felt differently about meeting them had I not been raised Jewish or had I found that Max and Lynette were not married or perhaps that my biological mother was Jewish but that my biological father was not. Who knows? It's all theoretical. You can not truly know how you are going to feel until you find yourself in that particular situation...

*In the happy run-up to Antony and Lynette's reunion, in the almost impossible-to-believe flawlessness of their first contact, I can't help but think of Mandy Egnal, and the polar opposition of her experience. When we last spoke, she left me with her most enduring lesson inherent in her search for her biological parents: beware the attempt to replace that which you have lost. Like everything else in their lives, Antony and Mandy's experiences of the search, and their lessons learnt, were as different as the women who bore them. Antony found a mother who longed to find him; Mandy found a mother who longed to forget her.*

*While Antony prepared for reunion, Mandy struggled to come to terms with rejection. And just as Antony had kept letters to re-read and treasure, so too had Mandy. But hers came from a different source: one of the social workers who saw her through the process of finding and losing her birth parents. Mandy kindly allowed me to re-print the letter which became her anthem:*

Dear Mandy,

One of the hardest, most disappointing and most frustrating things about any relationship is that it has to be reciprocal - a 2-way thing. When it is not, one person will always be left feeling hurt, abandoned and not 'good enough'. When that person is the birthmother you thought about for all those years, fantasising about how life might have been, and she refuses to acknowledge you as her child, the hurt is very very deep. The most complicated part about any adoptee tracing a birthparent is the fact that they rarely share the same expectations. In your instance, it was your need - not your birth mother's - that prompted

the search. Her hurt and loss took place a long time ago - at the time of your birth. She was told at the time, as girls were in those days, to put this all behind her and get on with her life. There was no chance of her ever having contact with her child again. Neither she, nor anyone in the family, ever spoke of "the baby" again. In order to survive, she needed to block out the pain and the memories. She became numb - probably no longer experiencing great sorrow but also unable to experience great joy...

Your entrance into her life would probably have evoked mixed feelings: huge relief that you were okay, that you'd had loving parents and that she got the opportunity to see you. But she was probably also terrified. Afraid that her life as she knew it - husband/children might find out her secret - that she would be exposed, and disrespected and rejected. She tried to maintain the status quo by not revealing your true identity - not understanding that this must have caused you great pain and hurt.

Your need in tracing your birth mother might have started out as a need to know who you are and where you come from, but your need seems to have grown over the years. It sounds as though what you are wanting from her is what she cannot give you - and that is, to be a mother to you. She gave birth to you, yes. But your mother was the one who looked after you, fed you, held you and loved you. Your mother was your mom, Selma. There simply is not that same bond between you and your birth mother. I always tell people before they embark on a search for birthparents: "if you are looking for a biological mother and father to be parents to you, you will be bitterly disappointed, because that very rarely happens. If you want an ongoing relationship, that also rarely happens. At best, your curiosity is satisfied, usually leaving you with a feeling of gratitude for the adoptive parents with whom you grew up and who loved and adored you."

It sounds as though the more you pursue this relationship with your birth mother, the more hurt and frustrated you become. It's almost like trying to quench a thirst with salt water - you drink and drink but just become more and more thirsty...Things have clearly not worked out the way you would have liked. So what can you do?



You have a choice:

You can focus on the fact that none of it is fair, that you still seem to be that frustrated child whose rights are unimportant, that you have always felt rejected and still do, that life has dealt you blow after blow. This may even all be true.

But also consider this: you were blessed indeed to have had the parents you did (life with your birth mother may not have been so great); each difficulty that you have had in your life has given you the opportunity to prove your courage and your strength of character; you have T.G. (*Thank G-d*) three beautiful, healthy children who love you and need you; your experience with your birth mother has made you sensitive to how it feels not to be loved back. This is your chance to turn your own hurt into strength - by giving all the love you have to your own children.

We all have within us a wounded child who will always be there. We cannot change the hurts of the past. But what we CAN change is our attitude. We can choose what to do with those hurtful experiences - whether to allow them to destroy us or whether to turn them into the very thing that makes us strong.

Accept what is your history, but move on. You are subjecting yourself to needless punishment'. Focus on what you HAVE rather than on what you don't have. Be the kind of mother to your children that your mom was to you - what a fine way to continue the heritage that Selma gave to you. This is something positive you can do. None of us choose the things that have hurt us in the past, but for them to continue hurting us in the present...that is OUR choice.

My advice to you Mandy, is let go of this and move on with your life. In giving to your children what you most want right now - love and acknowledgement – you will begin to feel whole again. Don't allow this experience to drag you down.

My very best wishes to you...

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Antony:

So the plans for the reunion got underway. We had to hire crockery, cutlery and utensils, and obviously think about preparing enough food. It was quite a crowd we were going to have at our *Seder* table.

At the last minute, we had t-shirts made for everybody, embossed with a circle and gold lettering that said 'Langman & Egnal Reunion Seattle 2002'. The stage was set.

University of Cape Town



Micarla and Yael

### THIS IS MY LOTTERY

**L**ynette:

Even though Seattle and LA are fairly close, that plane ride felt like ten hours. But eventually we landed.

When we got off the airplane, Max took my hand. He hadn't really spoken about how he felt, but I sensed that he was nervous too. We walked quickly towards the baggage claim area, my heart hammering so hard it hurt.

In the Seattle airport, you take an escalator down to the arrivals hall. We approached the escalator and I knew that the moment had finally come...

Antony:

René insisted on accompanying me to the airport and of course Yael was not going to miss out on the action. My little guy usually naps in the afternoon, so we had a friend stay with him. I had another close friend, Lester, who agreed to come with me and be around for the day.

It was a fairly quiet ride to the airport. There were lots of things going through my mind: What would they look like? Would I recognise them? How would the meeting be?

When we arrived at the airport we discovered that their plane was delayed by an hour, which just made the waiting worse. Ren was pacing up and down, taking some video footage with our little camera. My heart was racing pretty strong initially, but the plane's delay was a bit of an anti-climax and we all calmed down in the waiting process...

Lynette:

As we neared the bottom of the escalator I saw a party of people waiting at the bottom, but I have bad eyesight so I couldn't make them out entirely. Then as we got closer, it was like I had taken a step back in time. Because in front of me was a young version of Max...

I saw that the group were all wearing the same t-shirts. It said "Langman & Egnal Reunion Seattle 2002" – once again, I was struck by the similarity in our surnames. Jonny was just ahead of me and greeted Antony first. They both had these huge smiles on their faces and they looked like two peas in a pod. The resemblance was frightening.

And then...and then I don't know what happened exactly but suddenly his arms were around me and we were hugging and laughing and crying. Well *I* was crying. I just kept saying: "I can't believe this. I can't believe this..."

Antony:

I saw Lara first, then the others starting coming down the ramp and suddenly they were all there, with lots of emotions going round. Lynette came down last and she looked pretty much as I expected. We just hugged and hugged each other, and I felt so upbeat and happy. The reunion had finally taken place and we were all able to meet in person.

Out of all the people, Max was the most reserved and he took a little while to warm up. But I knew this about him from our phone conversations and he seemed very happy nevertheless...

Lynette:

There was so much kissing and hugging going on at the bottom of that escalator. Antony even had a friend there taking a video and photographs. We met René and Yael, and I had to keep pinching myself to know it was real...

Antony:

We had brought a whole bunch of t-shirts and just before we left the airport, everybody put on their own one. We all walked out dressed in blue, creating a bit of a stir! We went straight home on what I do believe was a typical Seattle April day: overcast but not yet raining...

Lynette:

We set off for Antony and René's house and I suddenly felt totally at ease. I felt like I had 'come home'. The hole in my soul had started easing and I felt complete. 'If I never have anything else,' I thought, 'this is enough.'

We arrived at the house and the video was still rolling, everyone talking about how they felt. It was just like a proper family reunion, of people who have known each other for years. There was not a single minute's awkwardness or tension. René went to make coffee and we all followed her into the kitchen – as if we did this every day!

Antony:

Practically speaking, René was more anxious than I was. She also wanted things to go smoothly but she had a lot more on her plate with regards to the mechanics of planning the week, feeding everybody, getting the *Pesach Seder* off the ground and so on. At the same time, she was so excited and completely caught up in the emotion.

We were all looking forward to the next few days to get to know each other better. But at no time did I feel strained or under pressure, initially or during the week. It was wonderful to have them all in my home and fortunately we had enough space to accommodate everybody...

Lynette:

That night, when I went to bed, I kept thinking: 'My son and his wife are in the room below. I know where he is and that he is ok. We are in the same house!'

The next morning I was up early and emerged with full war paint – I didn't want Antony to see me without my make-up! I went downstairs and he was in the kitchen. He greeted me by putting his arms around me and kissing me on the cheek. He greeted me like that every morning after that...

We arrived on a Saturday and Sunday was Yael's birthday. They had a party for her at the mall, in a special room. I felt like I was in a dream. Here I was, at my grandchild's birthday party, having just attended Micaela's the week before in LA, and looking forward to Marc's the following week! I was part of this family, sharing in their celebrations...

Antony:

The next few days were action-packed and we walked everyone right off their feet. Obviously, the big milestone was the *Pesach Seder* which we put together, hiring tables and chairs, cutlery and crockery. Before that, though, I took them to the major sites in Seattle. We went down to the famous Pike Place Market. We went up the mountains as most of them had never seen snow before. We also went out for a memorable dinner and that evening was a turning point early on in the week. Everyone spoke freely, sharing stories about our childhoods, eating, laughing and growing even more comfortable with each other...

Lynette:

Antony showed us around Seattle. He was as good as a professional tour guide!

I remember walking down the street on the second or third day. Max, Colin and Antony were walking in front of me and I just packed out laughing: they have the identical gait! All of them walk like ducks!

I kept looking at Antony in amazement. He has a wonderful temperament and a gift with people – he was voted one of the best doctors of the year! He is sensitive and caring – it shows in everything, especially the way he treats his wife and children. I loved the way he was towards Max, giving him time to warm to him and then, once Max's reserve had melted, he would lean over and kiss him on the top of his head! He has such an unselfish attitude. To me, he seemed like a perfect human being. But what was most amazing is that he seemed so familiar...

Antony:

We introduced Max and Lynette to friends and family at different stages of the week. That part was a bit awkward as I wasn't quite sure what to call them. It's a bit odd when you are out in public to introduce somebody as your 'birth parents'. A lot of people don't even know what birth parents are. It was less of a conflict for my two kids who immediately took to them as 'Bobbie and Zadie', Grandma and Grandpa – there was no doubt or wavering in their minds about who Max and Lynette were...

Lynette:

The build-up to the *Pesach Seder* was busy and emotional. We went to shul and met the Rabbi who, to my shock, was a woman! That would never happen in South Africa where the Jewish community is mostly Orthodox. But in America, things are different.

Ant introduced us by saying: "This is my mother and father." I looked at Max and almost fainted. I never thought I'd hear those words from him! He didn't call us 'Mom' and 'Dad' though, but he did introduce us to other people as his parents. And he made a big effort to have us meet his friends and relatives. They invited all their close friends round, my niece flew in from San Francisco and my nephew drove from Vancouver to see us all. It was a reunion in the true sense.

Antony:

I don't think any of us imagined how well the reunion would go. There was never any tension or disagreement. I think this was, at least in part, testimony to the Jewish community of South

Africa and the homogeneous life we all led. I've often thought about life in America and how it differs to life in South Africa, especially when we grew up in the '60s and '70s. This is something I've tried to explain to my American counterparts, but they don't have a reference point for it. Due to the closeness of the Jewish community as well as to the nature of education under the apartheid system, even though we grew up in different cities, all of us had a fairly similar life experience. It's a surreal thought, especially for my American friends and family, but I think of this example: If the Egnal/Langman family went away for a week on a cruise liner and we hooked up with other families who did not know our story, I don't believe that the stranger family would ever guess that we were not raised in the same household. That truly would be hard to repeat in the American culture. America is a much bigger country, with far greater diversity on every front, and the child growing up Jewish in LA would certainly have had a vastly different experience from the child growing up Jewish in, say, Atlanta. This is important as I believe it made the reunion easier for all of us. We have similar beliefs on discipline, family life and religious practice. There was not much left for conflict and it truly allowed us to get to know each other without things getting in the way...

Lynette:

Antony has an amazing attention to detail. He filmed our reunion and the *Pesach Seder*, and he organised for a professional photographer to come and take pictures of us all.

He always used to get up early to feed Marc so I took to getting up early as well. It was a special time of the day. One morning, towards the end of the week, I said: "Ant, leave Marc with me and go back to bed." He had been schlepping us everywhere and he was tired. So he handed me the baby and went back to sleep. That night, he came into the breakfast nook where we were all having coffee, and he said: "I saw something today that I never thought I'd see: my mother feeding my child." That brought instant tears to my eyes. It was the first time he had verbalised his feelings so clearly. He always showed how he felt, with his warmth and his affection, but this was the first time he'd said something out loud to everyone.

I wished I could thank little Marc. This journey began because of him, and I am so grateful. Sitting there feeding him, it was like I had been given my baby back, given another chance to



make things right. I felt so close to Marc. He would look up at me, almost questioningly, and I'd feel like I'd been given back a bit of what I'd missed with Antony.

One afternoon, I came downstairs and found that the house was empty. I went into the garden and Antony was sitting out there. Marc was next to him in a swing.

"Where's everyone?" I asked.

"They've gone off," he said. "They feel we need time alone together."

I sat down on the wood shavings on the ground and tried to gather my thoughts. The whole week, I had been itching for some time alone with Antony and now that I had it, I didn't know what to say, or how to say it.

"Antony," I said. "There is so much I want to say."

"Just say it, Lynette."

"I'm sorry. I'm so sorry..."

"You don't have to be sorry!"

"Times were so different then. I didn't want to give you up." I then told Antony the full story with a bit more detail than he already knew. He kept reassuring me: "It's all right; I've had a wonderful life and a wonderful childhood. It's all right."

We talked and talked and talked. I thanked him for opening this door and making me whole. And I was appreciative of this meaningful time alone together. But there was a slight discomfort – the only discomfort of the whole week. I was vulnerable, on my own. I was scared of saying the wrong thing and upsetting the wonderful time we'd all had.

After a couple of hours, everyone came back home and joked, "Is the crying all over now?" That broke the tension that I felt. But that talk with Ant had definitely been the hardest moment of the week...

Antony:

I did have a chance to spend some time alone with Lynette and I felt she needed the time more than I did because there were clearly things on her mind that she wanted to verbalise. She asked me on a number of occasions about whether I had thought about her and my birth parents. I could not lie to her then but I didn't want to hurt her either. I said that I didn't

remember ever thinking much about my birth parents, primarily because of the wonderful job my parents had done raising me.

I cannot begin to understand what Lynette and Max went through for the 40 years that they had no contact with me. She obviously carried a huge burden and a lot of that was now lifted with the reunion. She did mention that she and Max would talk about me a few times a year, particularly on my birthday. And that answered some of the questions I had had about what birth parents thought about on the day their child was given up for adoption. Certainly Lynette said that the 9<sup>th</sup> of August each year was a very sad time for her, but that changed the first Thursday after we made contact – the Thursday that had been my 40<sup>th</sup> birthday...

Lynette:

The reunion had an impact on everyone, but for me, one of the biggest effects was on my relationship with Max. The reunion brought us closer than we had been in a long time – it was almost like going back to our childhood romance and capturing what we lost. Even our children remarked on how publicly affectionate he was towards me during that week in Seattle. I realised, perhaps for the first time, what his pain must have been. I had always fixated on my feelings because Max never spoke about his. But he felt the loss deeply, and now we were both whole. So I learnt something new about my husband, even then. He is such a private person; I sometimes forget that he has deep emotions.

Antony:

I think it was a poignant aspect of the week for my siblings to have some of their questions answered. They all distinctly remembered nagging Lynette to have another child after Jonny was born. They obviously knew nothing of my existence and the fact that Lynette had actually had four C-sections instead of three. But at Jonny's birth, the doctor had categorically told Lynette that her uterus was getting very thin and she should not have any more kids. The reason for this was clearly something she could never discuss with her children. Lynette joked that many a time she would go and fill out paperwork at a doctor's office and was never quite sure whether to put down that she'd had three pregnancies or four. She would think about it

for a second and then write down 'three'...So we both had awkward moments with writing up our medical histories in a doctor's office!

Lynette:

Everything culminated in the *Pesach Seder*. René had been preparing for weeks and she put the whole thing together. While I was helping to lay the special *Pesach* table, I became very emotional. The last few months, the last few years, had all been building up to this...

Antony and René had invited some close friends to join us and Ant handled everything with his incredible eye for detail. He photographed and videotaped the whole evening. He photocopied a breakdown of the *Seder* proceedings for everyone, a simple document with beautiful explanations to go along with the prayer book which tells the story of Passover – the *Hagadah*. In addition, Ant also read out a children's storybook called 'The Soul Bird'. It talks about each of us having a soul bird inside that expresses our feelings. When the bird is happy, it sings...I knew that this was Antony's special way of telling us that his soul was happy too.

During the evening, Ant asked us all to think about where we were at that same time the year before, and whether we could ever have imagined how the future would turn out. He videotaped our responses and we went round the table, expressing how we felt.

At first, I couldn't speak. And while the others were telling their stories and impressions, I cried like a baby. We all cried...except Max! Everybody said the most beautiful things. Eventually, it was my turn.

I was the last to speak and I had to try and encapsulate my deepest emotions. So this is what I said:

"Antony, I can't tell you how grateful I am that you made that call. And I am so grateful that you and René have taken us into your home unconditionally, with such warmth.

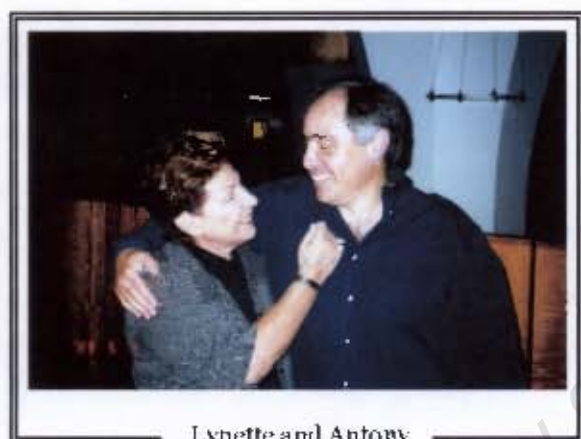
"I think it is very significant that we were reunited during Passover. This is the festival which remembers the exodus of the Jews from slavery in Egypt and their subsequent sojourn in the desert. The Jews wandered in the desert for 40 years. And for 40 long years, I have wondered about Antony...in my own kind of desert.

"Years ago, when I was just a teenager, I went to a fortune teller. Many of the things he told me came true. He said I would marry a man with the initials M.L.; that I would have four children; and that I would travel. All of those things happened.

"But he told me one thing about which I've always wondered: he said I would win a lottery. So for years I have bought tickets – in Rhodesia, in London, in South Africa. I never won a cent.

"But now I realise that he didn't mean money...

"Sitting here tonight, seeing all of you together, I finally understand. That fortune teller was right all along. Because this...*this* is my lottery."



## **PART TWO**

University of Cape Town



Lynette, Muizenberg Beach

1960

**L**ynette:

It was summer holidays of 1960. I was 16 years old and trying to be sexy – not that 'sexy' was allowed in our house, of course. But everyone was trying to be sexy.

We always spent our summers in Muizenberg. We had a flat near the old Empire building and we'd move in for six weeks. Most Jewish families from Cape Town did the same thing. All my friends from Claremont would be there, and all the other crowds too; from Newlands, Wynberg, and Sea Point. It was the social centre of the universe – especially for me because I had left school in Standard Eight that year to attend secretarial college at the Cape Technikon. Although I still had my closest friends, it was good to reconnect with everyone else.

That summer my friend Pam stayed with me. We spent every day sussing out the talent at the Snake Pit – the triangular beach wedged between the old Pavilion, the line of multi-

coloured bathing boxes, and the promenade. All the young people hung out there. Pam and I would take ages each morning getting dressed in our pedal pushers and winkelpickers – not that we needed those for the beach, but if there's one thing I learnt from my father it's that you can never be too well dressed! I'd tease my hair until it stood straight up or sometimes even pin a wiglet on with a sausage-roll clip. Then we'd stroll over to the Snake Pit at about midday. The smell of coconut oil hit you about 30 seconds before the sight of hundreds of bronzed bodies lying on brightly coloured towels. That was the place to see and be seen.

One particular day was really memorable. It was hot and there was no wind – so unusual for Muizenberg. We were still on the beach in the late afternoon and were just about to leave when I noticed a lock of hair. That's all. Just a lock of hair. It was a silky brown tassel hanging down the forehead of a boy I didn't know. I saw him push it away, but it fell right back into place. It jiggled and swayed. It was mesmerising. And so was its owner. I don't know how or why, but I instantly knew that this was not just some ordinary boy. This was the boy that I was going to marry.

*Lynette is a big believer in all things mystical and she tends to talk in that knowing, often clichéd way of people who conspire with the universe. Her speech is threaded with such phrases as 'I just knew' and 'something made/told me...'*

*Personally, I find such precognition hard to believe; but for Lynette, it is simply a way of being.*

We nicknamed him Luscious Locks; and once I saw him, I had to meet him. But I couldn't very well walk right up to him there at the Snake Pit and introduce myself. My parents would never have approved of such forward behaviour! In fact, I couldn't mention a word to my parents. The last time I'd told my mother some personal information, it had ended in tears. I can still feel the sting from that time when I confided that I had gotten my menstrual period. She immediately sat me down on the bed, looked me in the eye, and slapped me across my face! I burst into tears and she responded: "That's a Yiddish tradition. May you always have the bright red cheeks of a young girl!" So I definitely wasn't going to risk discovering another old wives' *bobbemeis* by telling her about Luscious Locks. And my father, well I thought he

was the height of propriety, so he wouldn't have been much help either. To him, I was still a little girl in lace and frills, far too young to be interested in boys. I adored him and wouldn't dare ruin his impressions of me and my behaviour.

A few days later, I went for a walk on the promenade. It was evening, and the sun was setting. You can taste the salty sea air on evenings like that. The promenade was full of people taking a walk before dinner time: couples strolling hand-in-hand, looking out at the sea; kids skipping along with hands still greasy from a packet of *slap chips*; groups of teenagers heading to the Bop Floor for music and dancing...The world walked that promenade. The light was fading and I was squinting to see ahead. I suffer from night blindness so I had to watch carefully where I was walking, and I almost literally bumped into my friend Joy's brother, Jack. I gave him an enthusiastic 'hello' and asked him where Joy was.

He seemed quite taken aback. "Is this the latest form of pickup?"

I was baffled. To think that I would try picking up my friend's brother! To think that I would try picking up anyone at all!

I looked at him in confusion. I could hardly see his face in the faded light and I was about to respond when I noticed that he seemed to be fiddling with his hair, pushing back a piece that kept...falling...f o r w a r d...Oh my goodness! This wasn't Jack at all! This was Luscious Locks! I was so embarrassed when I realised my mistake and so grateful for the darkness because my blush would have matched my red sweater! I apologised and then ran off as fast as I could in my platform cork shoes.

A week later, Pam and I were walking along the promenade again. This time it was daylight and I could see clearly, so I couldn't mistake Jack walking towards us...accompanied by none other than Luscious Locks himself! I could not believe that he and Jack had been friends all along! So that was the fateful day when I was finally introduced to my future husband.

I didn't see Max again after that time on the promenade. The holiday season came to an end and we moved back to our home in Claremont. But I couldn't just return to normal life. My head burned with thoughts of Max. Eventually, I plucked up the courage to phone Jack and ask him about Max. Jack was quite amused. But he promised to put in a good word on my



behalf. I put down the phone and blushed. I could not believe I'd put myself out there so flagrantly!

You must understand: this wasn't the sort of thing that good girls did. My parents were strict. They always insisted on proper behaviour and believed in firm gender roles. They were old fashioned and although my father was warm and had a lovely sense of humour, he would find nothing amusing in the idea of me 'chasing' a boy. My mother would not even hear of such indecent behaviour! In those days certainly, you put your parents on a pedestal and never ever questioned their law.

But still, I didn't see any harm in asking after Max. And my forwardness paid off because soon after that phone call to Jack, my friends conspired to get us together and Max called me himself. I almost dropped the telephone in shock! But we had no trouble talking. We chatted for ages, and eventually he said, "Well if I'm going to visit you this evening then you'd better give me your address."

That night, Max arrived at my door looking as if he'd just stepped out of a dream. We spent the evening sitting on the sofa in the enclosed *stoep*, listening to music, eating popcorn, and talking about things we had in common. He was the perfect gentleman: when my parents walked in, he stood up and shook my father's hand with a firm grip; I knew my dad was impressed because his moustache twitched with a small smile. Then Max and I spent the night talking and laughing. It was just perfect – the kind of night that makes you believe that Mills & Boon is based on a true story.

I'll never forget that first date. I found out so much about Max! He was busy with his accountancy studies at the University of Cape Town and working part-time doing his articles. He was something of a loner where I was sociable and outgoing, but otherwise we enjoyed many of the same things. Even my parents eventually relaxed enough to leave us alone and keep a respectful distance, although my father's occasional cough reminded us that we were never far from his eagle eye.

*Lynette stops talking and stares out the window for a while. It's a glistening May evening and the clouds in the winter sky have shaken off the last of the day's rain. Max walks*

*through to sit in the adjacent lounge, but then gets up and leaves almost immediately. She watches him go.*

*Lynette shakes her head and looks out again. The apartment is so close to the road that cars compete with waves. She gets up to close the window, plunging us into relative silence. The noise was intruding on her memories.*

I had never kissed a boy before, you know. I'd never even held a boy's hand. Even though Max was only 17 – one year older than me – I was sure that he had much more experience in that department. When he left late that night, I walked him to the front gate. We had spent hours getting to know each other, yet I was suddenly shy and nervous, as if I was about to write a final exam...

*She falls quiet again and looks down at her clasped hands, twitching thumbs. Her shoulder shrugs involuntarily, trying to shield her face where the faintest glow of a blush is growing. She glances up and then away, almost as if she's become that girl again, too shy to tell me what happened next...too coy to tell me about how he walked her to the gate and offered her his jacket; about how they simply knew that they would see each other again; and about how he kissed her goodnight – a long, sweet kiss – right there under the streetlamp.*

So that was that for me and Max. We started dating and were besotted with each other. He wasn't from my crowd, though. He lived in Tamboerskloof – up on the slopes of Table Mountain, a good 30 minute bus ride from my house in the suburbs. And he didn't have a car so it was a real labour of love every time he took me out. He'd catch the bus all the way to Claremont to fetch me and then we'd take the bus to wherever we were going. Then he'd accompany me on the bus home at the end of the date and still have to get back to Tamboerskloof. As I said, a labour a love, especially since we socialised a lot – on my instruction! I was the social butterfly where he was the cocooned silkworm, but he always indulged me. We'd double date with Ivan Epstein and Irene Moss, taking picnics to Bainskloof, or going tenpin bowling, or to the drive-in. We'd go into town to watch movies, browse the shops and have coffee at the Waldorf Café. We spent almost every Sunday evening

at Rose Court for the hop and we were regular features at the dances in the shul halls. We really did get around.

Max wasn't really the demonstrative type – especially not in public. Like all the other couples, we'd go to Rhodes Memorial or Strandfontein beach to smooch! But in front of others we always held back. Max's family was even more conservative than mine. His parents still spoke Yiddish, ignored fashion and kept a trim, simple home. I shook slightly the first time I met them, almost dropping my cup of tea all over my pressed white skirt. But they were very hospitable and we warmed to each other immediately. In fact, I became very close to Max's older sister Rae. She always had a protective eye out for me. She even took Max aside after we had been dating for a little while and said to him, "Lynette is not the type of girl you mess around, ok?!"

So we fell happily in love. We were meant to be together: fate, and an awkward Muizenberg moment, saw to that. If he had told me to jump, I would have looked for the nearest cliff. Even though we had very different personalities, we gelled effortlessly. We spent every weekend together, and snatched free moments during the week. Before I even knew it, we'd been dating for six months.

I felt older than my sixteen years when I was with Max. I still felt like a child at home, but with him I was a woman of the world. Growing up, I had been used to treating matters of the heart and body with kid gloves. My mother never encouraged openness or questions. Neither of my parents did. But I felt a natural closeness to Max and our relationship matured quickly. I was never shy or embarrassed with him...

*She trails off again and looks down, twisting in her chair. The oak creaks under her weight and the sound hangs in the air. She wants to tell me but euphemisms keep getting in the way...*

*...For one agonising moment nothing happened. Then his arms gathered her up against him and the wild warmth of love flooded her being. Her face was pressed against his chest and she was barely able to breath.*

'Oh God,' he groaned, his face in her hair...Then in an almost violent gesture he lifted up her face and kissed her. There was no restraint in his kiss and she trembled in his arms, overwhelmed by the emotions sweeping through her. His hands slid under her shirt, stroking her bare back. There was nothing in her mind now but the sweet ecstasy of his touch – no words, no thoughts. All self-control left her, but it didn't matter now. It didn't matter. She kissed him back hungrily, losing herself in the waves of love washing over her...

Gently he pushed her down, putting his face against her breast. She could feel his hunger and his need for her and she closed her eyes, moving her hands slowly down his back...She had never experienced the feelings now rushing through her. The ecstasy was almost terrifying in its intensity, leaving her weak and trembling.

After a while he slowly raised his head and his eyes looked darkly into hers.

'I have to warn you,' he said in a low voice. 'You'd better marry me. You'd better not tell me you don't believe in marriage.'

She laughed softly. 'I'm old-fashioned when it comes to marriage. I like the real thing – commitment, strings attached and everything.'

'Good. That's exactly what I wanted to hear.'

She pulled his face towards her, kissed him drunkenly. She felt his hands on her breasts, caressing her tenderly.

'You're warm and soft and beautiful,' he whispered.

She had no more words, only the need for him to go on touching her, kissing her...

Karen van der Zee, 'Sweet Not Always'. Mills & Boon, London, 1979, pp 187-188.



Lynette and Max



Lynette: bridesmaid, 1961

## NO MONEY, NO MOTOR CAR, NO PROSPECTS

**B**reaching the subject of sex with Lynette is awkward, laced with the residual taboo of conservative times. Although Max's reserve is thawing, I am still too hesitant to discuss such a topic with him. I must rely on imagination and the bits that Lynette volunteers. But her very reticence is telling; it allows me glimpses into an era which was slow to take up the rising hemlines of the West in the 1960s. In Jewish Cape Town of that time, sex was for after marriage, desire was not for discussion, and girls were Madonnas only.

Lynette:

I got a job at a legal firm as a junior secretary. It was the type of job that women had in those days, if they were working at all. In the beginning, I thought it was quite exciting. I felt grown-

up and independent, especially since most of my friends were still in high school. While they were putting on school uniforms, I was dressing in neat skirts and a tan leather handbag which was a gift from my father. I started wearing face powder and bright lipstick, and kept a small comb in my bag to neaten my hair during the day. I loved feeling part of the town buzz – especially in the early mornings with everyone hurrying to work along St George's Street.

But soon I began to find work tiring. I'd come home every day and head straight to my room for a rest. I was a diligent worker and preferred to arrive early or leave late rather than disappoint my boss. I guessed I just had to get used to the hours.

Max and I were still dating, of course. And happier than ever. I was 17 years old and in love – what could be better? I was working hard, living up to my father's philosophy that dignity and hard work go hand in hand. I wanted to make my parents proud of me. And I think they were.

It was only when I missed my menstrual period for the second time that I really noticed. I still didn't think much of it, though, and I certainly didn't mention it to anyone. I'd had a tough time adjusting to work, and I was sure that my body was just too exhausted to bother with 'the curse.' To tell the truth, I was more than happy not to have to deal with it for a while. Our social life was busy and I didn't have much time to myself. My body was just telling me that I was run-down. So I took some extra vitamins, picked up some smelling salts and glucose sticks at the chemist, and put it out of my mind.

A few days after my third period was due, though, I started to worry. I kept running to the toilet to examine my panties, and I'd rub myself vigorously to check. But all I'd get were specks of toilet paper. How ironic! I was so used to dreading my monthly flow, and now all I wished for was a spot of blood.

I decided to give it a whole week before I said something to Max – I didn't want to alarm him unnecessarily. And during that time I tried not to worry about it. But it was hard. Every visit to the toilet yielded nothing. Every twinge in my stomach made me hopeful of a menstrual cramp. And all that time I was trying to behave normally, concentrate on work and fight my fatigue. It was a challenge.

At the end of the week there was still nothing. I had to tell Max.

I remember we were on our way to bioscope to see a James Dean movie. He was all the rage then, James Dean. And at the tea-room bioscopes, like the Majestic, you could get a free cold drink while you watched the movie. But that evening I couldn't even think about the movie until I'd spoken to Max.

I was nervous about telling him. What if he didn't want to be with me anymore? What if I lost him? But I couldn't keep my worries to myself.

We got off the bus near the bioscope and were walking slowly. We were early and had some time before the movie started. It was still light outside and we sat on a low wall, holding hands and watching people walk past. Max was talking but I couldn't listen. I must have interrupted him.

"Um Max," I said, "I have to tell you something." I couldn't seem to find the words. I had started the sentence a hundred times over in my head, but nothing sounded right. I knew I should just come right out with it and stop delaying. I'd waited long enough already.

"Well, uh, I haven't had a period for three months. I'm scared I may be... p...p...pregnant." I choked on the word. It was embarrassing enough to have to talk about periods, never mind being so afraid of what this might mean.

He didn't even hesitate – almost as if he was expecting this announcement. He immediately shook his head and said, "It can't be. No, it can't be. I know what it is: it's all this dieting that you do. I've heard that dieting can have an affect on your period. It's definitely that."

I hadn't expected that response, but it did make a lot of sense. And he sounded so sure of himself that I felt instantly calmed.

"Definitely," he repeated. "Don't worry – it'll come."

Of course I thought Max was right. That was the perfect explanation! I was always aware of being slightly overweight, and I had dieted for ages (never very successfully, I might add). His reason made sense, and it was far less terrifying than the alternative. In fact, I could hardly bring myself to think about the alternative. So I put it down to dieting. And waited for the next month.

*She taps her fingers on the table, drumming out the tension – that wary search which grasps at any rationalisation other than the most likely. Three periods is a lot to miss and dismiss! And how could Max have been so sure? Was denial just the best defence?*

*I ask hesitantly if it would be possible to talk to Max about this. Until now, he has remained just beyond my reach.*

*Lynette agrees to broach the idea with him and he is surprisingly willing to talk. Perhaps he has eavesdropped on enough of our conversations to realise that there is very little I don't or won't know about their history. Or perhaps he wants to set some record straight.*

*Max and I meet at the Langman apartment, but in the lounge rather than the dining room. He offers me a drink then sinks into a weathered armchair, not altogether comfortably. Although Lynette is home, she stays out of sight, having closed the inter-leading doors to give us privacy.*

*Max Langman is a pragmatist. He dresses for the weather, spends within his budget, and uses one word when most use ten. He keeps his moustache adequately trimmed and is a reliable attendee at daily synagogue services. His family have all spoken about his reserved manner and his sharp wit.*

*So I am not expecting his self-assured honesty. Max addresses my questions – and his life – with a candour that is unadorned by sketchy memories and reinvented emotion. He is blunt and refreshing.*

Max:

I was only 18 years old at the time you are talking about. I was a baby! We were both babies! I had no money, no motor car, no prospects. I was a poor kid and Lynette was my first girlfriend. I used to date her with the bus! I came from a poor background; my parents only just made a living and for most of my childhood we had lived in Woodstock, which was not the best of areas. We only moved to Tamboerskloof when I was in Standard Eight because my older sister insisted that we get out of Woodstock.



My parents were from the old country, *de heim*. They came out to South Africa in the 20s and didn't have much money. I had to pay for my own varsity fees, using the little money I earned as an articled clerk. So we were from the wrong side of the tracks. And Tilly Zinn made it obvious that she disapproved of me. She was a snob, Tilly. She used to make snide remarks and let me know just how she felt about my lack of status.

Lola was a fancy boy. But he was very nice. He always made you feel welcome in his home, and was very warm and charming. But Tilly was impossible. I don't think she ever forgave Lynette for the pregnancy...

I don't remember the day Lynette told me about missing a period. I don't remember much detail from that time at all. Sorry to disappoint you. There is so much I've closed the blinds on. After that day, I didn't talk about any of this with a single person. I cut it off – could never bring myself to discuss it. So yes, it is possible that I just grasped at some excuse about why Lynette had missed her period. Anything to avoid the truth...

Lynette:

I next thought about the situation when I missed my fourth period. But I managed to come up with some other reason. Max agreed that I was working too hard and worrying too much, which would throw my normal cycle. Despite the diet theory, I had actually put on some weight and was getting a bit soft around the edges, so I started dieting even more seriously. I'd only eat a tiny amount – like a hard-boiled egg and two cream crackers for dinner. My mother didn't argue. If anything, she was glad that I was finally taking control of my ongoing weight problem!

But eating a handful of food a day didn't seem to help much. My clothes felt tight, my breasts felt sore, and I was always uncomfortable. I would use a safety pin – you know, the kind we used to use on babies' nappies – to fasten the top of my pants, giving me a few spare inches around the waist. And I only wore loose-fitting t-shirts and blouses – anything to hide myself.

Of course I told no-one other than Max about how I was feeling. When I skipped my fifth period and complained about how uncomfortable I was, he finally said: "I can't think of any

other reasons that will make you stop worrying. I still think you should stop dieting and try relaxing more, but if you're so concerned then why don't you go see a doctor?"

Not a chance! That was the last thing on earth that I would think of doing. I couldn't risk seeing a doctor...I couldn't risk what they might find out! We would just have to deal with this ourselves and I would find a way to get better.

But I was still so tired. Even our social life started to suffer because I just couldn't face going out in the evenings after a whole day of work. All I wanted to do was come home and climb straight into bed. My parents thought that was strange, but they knew I was working hard and generally left me alone. They didn't approve of me lounging around the house in my comfortable gown and slippers, though. "You look untidy and unattractive – like a *shlump*," my father would say, with my mother not far behind. "You should take pride in your appearance – it's what the world sees."

*Lynette flicks an imaginary speck of dust off her cuff and sits up straight. Her father's voice is ringing in our ears...She turns to stare at a silver-framed photograph of a man in a top hat – slim and urbane, with smooth skin and a neatly clipped moustache. Her father, Lola Zinn.*

I couldn't tell my parents what was worrying me. I couldn't even admit it to myself! I knew that I simply had to block it out – find a way to banish it from my mind and from my body. Max and I stopped talking about it and I forced myself to stop worrying. And for a good while it was quite possible to ignore something that wasn't a reality – or that I didn't allow to become a reality. I just carried on with my life and my baggy clothes. [Pauses]. But then... [swallows]...then there was that time in the bath...

*At dinner, she watched her sisters wolf down their fried eggs. The sight of those runny yolks floating in their beds of slimy white was enough to make her gag, and she politely refused a serving, settling instead for a glass of orange juice and some dry toast. It's about all she could tolerate.*

*As soon as she could, she excused herself from the table and headed for the comfort of her room, sinking gratefully onto her bed. It had been a strange day: she kept getting a popping sensation in her stomach, but she didn't feel sick. Her concentration was worse than ever and it was all she could do to finish that last dictation. Maybe a hot bath would help.*

*She ran a deep one and fell back into the arms of the steam. She flexed her feet so that her toes emerged like iceberg tips, and tried to relax. But still the popping persisted. She opened her eyes and stared mournfully down at her thickening waistline.*

*And what she saw made her stifle a scream.*

*Protruding from the side of her belly was an undeniable lump. As she watched it, silently willing it to go away, it disappeared and reappeared lower down. The once-smooth playing field of her teenage stomach was churning, and every now and then she felt a dull thud, deep inside her. Something – or someone – was trying to make space.*

*She felt faint and tried to catch her breath, gripping the hand rails to keep her from slipping under. She squeezed her eyes shut, trying to blot out the vision. After a few seconds, she opened them again, warily. The bump persisted. It was uninvited, but there to stay.*

*Six due dates for her period had come and gone.*

So that was when I knew. For sure. I was p...p...pregnant. I was with child. I was expecting. Whatever way you looked at it, I was the shame of my household.

My mind raced with fears after I realised there was no getting away from it. My parents will disown me. This is worse than a death for them. This will tear huge gashes in their reputation. What will everyone think? This will ruin everything they have worked so hard to build. I'm a despicable girl. I'm a disgrace, an embarrassment. They will disown me. They'll throw me out the house and I'll have nowhere to go. They will disown me...

I can't have a baby. Childbirth is about screams, pain, torture – I've seen it in the movies. I can't do that. I can't handle that...

*She's run out of breath so she inhales deeply and then slowly lets it out.*

Of course I still didn't tell anyone. Max and I decided that we'd get married – we wanted to anyway – but we didn't discuss when or where. In fact, after we made that decision we hardly ever discussed the situation. It seems strange now, but we just held on to denial, hoping that the problem would somehow take care of itself.

It's amazing what the mind can do if you're scared enough. I was scared that I'd be an outcast. I was scared that Max would leave me. I didn't want to put a noose around his neck, but I needed his reassurance. And he isn't very verbal, so I'd try and coax it out of him. "Do you still love me?" I'd ask. "Do you still want to be with me?" He would put his arms around me and try to support me, but I was terrified. So I shut the door on that part of my mind that knew I was pregnant. I do have that ability – maybe that's when I first learnt how. I can put something aside and only deal with it when I absolutely have to. Every now and then I'd get a flash of "How am I going to get this thing out of me?" but I'd immediately tell myself not to think about it. It was like closing a running tap – I just shut off the valve.

I know that in this day and age it is difficult to believe that I did not know about contraception. I honestly did not know much about sex at all and did not believe that my actions could cause a pregnancy. I was that naïve. Nobody ever spoke about prevention and I don't know if the pill was in existence then; even if it was, nobody had ever discussed this type of thing with me. So the whole idea of being pregnant was a shock that my mind could hardly grasp.

I still tried to lose weight and hide my body. I would strap myself up with corsets, belts and step-ins. I felt squashed – it was such a relief to undress and put on my gown every evening! Nor was I showing much. Whatever I did show was probably just a replacement for all the weight I was losing from not eating. And because I was never thin, it wasn't all that obvious.

So no-one noticed. No-one asked questions or became suspicious, even when I started making excuses for cancelling arrangements. I perfected the art of cover-up. In fact, I was a bridesmaid at my cousin's wedding when I was seven months pregnant and still no-one noticed. Hang on, I'll show you....

*Lynette leaves the room for a few minutes. She returns with an old photograph of her cousin's wedding party. It's black and white, creasing at the edges, but I can make her out*

*clearly. She's distinct because of the gap in her teeth and the flower in her hair. But otherwise, she looks just like the rest: freshly scrubbed girls with generous hips, bouffé white skirts and court shoes. Lynette looks neither pregnant nor terrified. I'm amazed: seven months along and no-one is any the wiser. From the photo, it seems possible, but surely people would have noticed something, anything?*

No-one noticed a thing at that wedding. But I felt awful – so uncomfortable, especially in that heat! It was stuffy inside the shul, and especially hot under the *chuppah*. I had such sore feet – we had to stand through the whole ceremony and I thought I was going to faint! It felt like the rabbi droned on for hours under the *chuppah* while I was sweating whole rivers down my corset! It was winter but the day was warm and the room was overheated. Even the bride was hot – and she wasn't seven months pregnant! So no-one noticed that I was hot or uncomfortable because we all were. The idea of pregnancy was the last thing on anyone's mind!

Nevertheless, I do remember feeling paranoid that people were watching me and that they could see the bulge in my stomach. I had hidden it well, but I was sure that someone would detect my secret. It felt so obvious to me, I was sure it was obvious to the whole world.

I didn't dance much that night. I just couldn't lug my body around the dance floor. And that felt strange – I was usually the first one to tap my feet and get up to dance. I felt utterly miserable and pathetic. I couldn't stop thinking that this was exactly the kind of wedding I would have dreamed of having with Max. Big, white, happy. I couldn't see how that was ever going to happen. It made me want to burst into tears. But I didn't dare... [*shakes her head*]. On no. If I cried, my mother would definitely know that something was up...



Lola and Tilly Zinn

### A TERRIBLE SHANDE

I wait for Lynette at Café Riteve – named for the Lithuanian town from which so many South African Jews hailed. I thought it would be an appropriate venue for our discussion since it conjures up useful images of struggling Jewish immigrants and steaming chicken soup which will help me connect with the parental influence on her youth. Lynette is wary about meeting here: it is a popular lunch spot for members of the very community from which her life-long secret was kept and even though she is increasingly less concerned with public opinion, old habits die hard. She does not want to draw attention to herself.

So we sit in a corner, surrounded by quaint Jewish artefacts on sale at the next-door shop, huddled over two incongruous cappuccinos.

Lynette:

Not long after my cousin's wedding, around the time of my 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, my mother started to worry about my health. Instead of criticising me for dressing like a *shloomp*, she started asking me if I was feeling ok, if I had a temperature, or if I'd had enough to eat. I tried to put her off with protests that I was fine, but out of the corner of my eye I could see her hovering, watching me.

I feel dreadful saying this, but it was quite unusual for my mother to take that kind of intense interest in me. She loved her children, but she was a detached mother. She wasn't really involved with us in a tell-me-about-your-day kind of way. Before we were born, she had been a sales lady at Oblowitz Brothers in Salt River. They imported women's fashion, and I can just see her wafting through the French silk, doing a good job of selling while she coveted each piece. There in the lively trade of Salt River, as people buzzed along Sir Lowry Road from tailor to antique store to furniture shop, she must have felt quite the woman of the world. But after she had kids, she stopped working. And started playing cards. When we came home from school we'd find her immersed in a game of Rummy, cards neatly fanned out in one hand and a burning Idle Wild Menthol cigarette in the other. Cards and betting on the horses – those were her passions. We took care of ourselves.

Still, she was a social person, and she was generous with her invitations to friends and family. We often had long Sunday lunches at our place and dinners on *Shabbat* or even during the week. Of all of these, one in particular stands out.

I came home from work one evening, just before my 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, to find my Uncle Mike sitting on the porch with my father, drinking schnapps and talking. Now Uncle Mike wasn't really my uncle. He was a close friend of my parents' and our family doctor, had been for years. He was part of the family, and I adored him – a stocky man with silver hair and the bluest eyes you've ever seen. He had an air of mischief about him and a great sense of humour. When he laughed, it bubbled up right from his belly and you couldn't help laughing with him. He was excellent company. At the time, we had a maid called Flora who was a superb cook. She prepared full meals every night except Saturdays and Sundays when she was off, and my mother would make us eggs on toast. Uncle Mike couldn't resist Flora's meals, so he often

used to pop round to our house and land up staying for dinner. It wasn't unusual to find him on our porch at any time of the year, having a *lechaim* with my father.

Dinner that night was one of Flora's signature dishes: roast leg of lamb, with garden peas and golden potato wedges. I was aware of my mother watching what I was eating, so I made sure to have a bit – but not too much – of everything. Usually, it was a trial for me to sit at that table when all I wanted was to get to my bed. But conversations were far more entertaining when Uncle Mike was around, so I didn't mind so much that night. Eventually, though, I excused myself and went off to my room where I changed into my comfortable cotton pyjamas – the ones with tiny yellow flowers on a background of pale blue – and lay down with the latest Mills & Boon.

The adults had all retired to the lounge, so I was surprised when Uncle Mike knocked on my door and asked to come in.

"It's open, Uncle Mike, just push," I said.

He poked his head round the door and then the rest of him followed. He looked reluctant to be there. I remember thinking that his eyes seemed to have lost their usual sparkle, and his forehead was crumpled into a frown.

"Lynette, don't be alarmed," he said. "I've just been chatting with your parents and your mother is worried about you. She has noticed that you have very little energy and she thinks that you're not behaving like yourself. She's concerned, my dear. She wants me to examine you."

I was speechless for the few seconds before I realised that my house of cards was about to come tumbling straight down. I felt a sudden rush of panic. My heart was racing and I was sure that I could feel the baby's beating even faster. I scrambled for a response that would clear everything up and send him away. But he was determined.

"Come lie here on the bed and let me take a look at you. I'm sure everything will be just fine." He patted the bed and smoothed out the brown woollen blanket.

I couldn't let him examine me – he would know the truth in a second! I had to escape, but how? And where would I go? My bedroom suddenly felt smaller than a bar fridge. My parents were just down the hall, between me and the front door. Who was I kidding? I couldn't get away. There was nowhere to go but here, and nothing to do but lie down...



"When was your last period?" he asked.

I told him I had gotten it about two months previously. Of course that was an outright lie but I couldn't bring myself to admit that I'd already skipped seven periods. Besides, I still believed that there was a chance this would all go away if I wished hard enough. Uncle Mike looked doubtful too – his frown furrowed even further. But he didn't question me.

"Two months ago you say."

"Uh huh."

"Well, then, there's something there that shouldn't be. I want you to have an x-ray tomorrow."

I knew that Uncle Mike knew. His remedy for everything was "Take 2 Disprins and call me in the morning," but he couldn't offer me that treatment now. He didn't voice his opinion though. I think that he understood the ramifications of the situation and he wanted to be absolutely sure before he dropped a bombshell like that on my parents. He understood what this would mean to them – how it would destroy their lives – and he didn't want to make any mistakes. So he just told me about the x-ray, left the room and returned to the lounge where my parents were waiting.

I stood on tiptoes, listening for the slightest raised voice from beyond the glass doors. But there was none. Uncle Mike was probably keeping his suspicions to himself. After what seemed like an eternity, I heard the lounge doors creak open and my parents showed Uncle Mike out. My mother's heels tapped on the wooden floors, almost drowning out the conversation. But there was nothing to hear except thank you and goodbye. My father closed the front door and dragged the chain across the lock. Then he walked around switching off lights while my mother straightened the rugs. They didn't speak. When all was dark, they walked down the hall towards their bedroom. And then there was nothing.

*Lynette is fiddling with the teardrop pendant around her neck, tugging it from side to side along its thin chain. It's almost hypnotic to watch her and for a few seconds, I fixate on the soft rasping of gold on gold. We don't even notice the din of Café Riteve's lunchtime crowd.*

I hardly slept that night. I kept imagining a horrible fate. I would be disowned, thrown out of my parents' house and cut off from their lives. The mirrors would be covered in the Jewish manner of mourning and I would have nowhere to go...

I phoned Max early the next morning and told him what had happened. He didn't know what to say. There was nothing *to* say. I think he might have wished me luck – as if that was going to help! I needed more than luck. I needed a miracle.

My father drove us into town that morning and dropped me and my mother off on the corner of Strand and Adderley streets, near the radiologist's offices. I remember that my mother was all dressed up in a plum-coloured suit and matching hat with a self-coloured rose on the brim. Going "into town" was an event, you know. We had eaten breakfast without saying much, although she didn't seem angry. Just firm.

You could smell the seaweed that morning. You can always smell the seaweed on stormy mornings, just before the sky breaks. It wasn't raining yet, but the air was heavy. My mother walked briskly into the Medical Centre and took the stairs to the second floor. I followed, breathing hard with exertion and nerves.

The radiologist's practice was a big one. Even the doors were huge. And there were lots of people coming and going all the time, many of them carrying oversized brown envelopes. The room was stark – there were no pot plants or pictures of healthy bones on the wall. There were just a few magazines scattered on a low table, and the turquoise cloth-covered chairs arranged in a square for waiting patients. My mother announced our arrival to the receptionist in a low voice, almost as if she didn't want anyone to hear the name. And we sat down to wait.

You know, even then, I held on to a last inch of hope. "Maybe I've made a mistake," I thought. "Maybe there is another reason..." But even that couldn't calm me down. I felt sick – with a nausea that was...that was...hot and cold at the same time. I was sure that all the people in the waiting room knew what was wrong with me. I was sure that they were all looking at me, judging me, shaking their heads in disgust. I could hardly sit still. I tried to read a magazine – I remember, it was a Reader's Digest – but all I could think of was how lucky the people in the photographs were not to be pregnant. If that's in fact what I was...

At last, they called me. I walked alone through one of the clean white doors and I looked back to see my mother sitting quietly, almost shyly. It was as if she was trying to fold herself into her jacket, as if she didn't want to take up space. I probably imagined it, but that was how it looked to me.

The radiographer told me to undress and put on a blue hospital gown – the kind that you aren't sure whether to leave open at the front or the back. I tried to undress as slowly as I could, but there was no delaying. Then she took me through to the x-ray room. She had me stand facing this big white screen and told me to keep very still. Then I heard some dull clicking and buzzing while the machine took its pictures. I felt transparent – as if this was a live broadcast to the entire world. When the machine was finished, she told me to get dressed and wait at the front for the x-rays.

I joined my mother back in the waiting room. She was still sitting in the same position, clasping her handbag in an iron grip. We didn't talk. We just waited. I felt frozen. I didn't want to get up to fetch a magazine or a glass of water. I didn't want anyone to look at me. So I just sat. I was vaguely aware of people coming and going but it was like they were moving through toffee. I just stared straight ahead of me.

Sometimes, when I'm in a daze, I focus on those bubbly wisps of light that you can see when you close your eyes...There's a word for them...they're like, um, what're they called, what're they called...? *'Phosphenes' I interject.* Yes, that's it! Well, if I concentrate I can watch them floating even with my eyes open. It helps take my mind of things. So that's what I did. I watched phosphenes until I heard them calling. "Mrs Zinn, will you come through please?" They didn't ask for me, just motioned for my mother to go through to the doctor's office. And they left me to wait.

I don't know how long they took in there. But eventually my mother emerged. She walked towards me, but then passed straight by and headed for the door. All she said was: "Daddy is coming to fetch us. We'll wait for him downstairs." And then she disappeared through the doors and into the corridor.

I followed her into the street, running to keep up with her. But she still wouldn't say anything. And I was too afraid to ask. She marched back to the corner of Strand and Adderley Streets to wait for my father.

I remember seeing a group of young girls crossing the road. They all had long hair and long legs, with high heels that looked much too light for the weather. They must have just come from the flower market because they were carrying fresh bunches of white gladioli and lilies. And they were laughing.

I could already feel moisture settling on my skin. It was definitely going to rain. People were running in and out of Cleghorns and Ackermans, some putting up umbrellas in anticipation. But we just stood out there, waiting for my father's black and white Humber, waiting for the rain.

*Lynette pauses and takes a sip of water. She sets the glass down precisely in the centre of a wooden coaster, wiping off precipitation with the back of her hand. I must bear with her, she says, because her memory of what happened next is cloudy. She remembers the words but not always the order in which they were spoken.*

When my father did arrive, I climbed slowly into the back seat. My mother must have told him the results of the x-ray when she phoned him from the doctor's office. Neither of them said a word – not to me, not to each other – until we were out of the city centre, driving past the docks. Nor did I ask. I didn't say anything. I just waited for someone else to speak.

And when my mother did, I wished she hadn't.

"Do you know what's wrong with you?" she said, She couldn't even look at me in the rear-view mirror.

"No, what's wrong with me?"

"YOU," she said, "YOU are going to have a baby."

*Lynette started to cry.*

*Her father had the heater on. The blasts of warm air were suffocating. She could smell petrol and her mother's sweet perfume – Joy by Jean Patou – and she wanted to vomit.*

*They drove past the place where the fishing boats displayed their catch at the end of the day, discarded guts and scales lying at the roadside. Her father was speeding, and her tears blurred the scenery even further. They approached a stop street and he braked, but only at the last minute. The car kicked up stones as he swerved to a halt at the side of the road.*

*For a moment, all was still. And then he started banging. He pounded his fists on the steering wheel and the whole car shuddered. Thud! Thud! Thud! And he was screaming: "Do you know what you've done?" Neat beads of sweat formed a soldier's line-up along his brow. "Can you imagine what a thing you've done? You are going to disgrace us! How am I going to face everybody? How will we show our faces in public?" He gasped for air, pulling at the necktie that was suddenly far too tight. He was still banging and Lynette cowered on the back seat. "Have we taught you nothing? We've been good parents – given you a good home, a good Jewish home with values. What will people say? Oi," his voice broke, "what will people say?"*

*Her mother was quiet, but her shoulders were shaking slightly. Lola stopped banging and the car was hushed. The silence was almost worse.*

*He turned to look at her for the first time, eyes not quite focused. "That boyfriend of yours..." he warned. "I'll...I'll...I'll kill him!"*

When you imagine my father's rage, you can't apply modern-day behaviour to it. No, it was something different, something that belonged to another age, another generation.

My father was an immigrant. He grew up with the violent anti-Semitism of Latvia in the early 1900's, in a strict Jewish home where nobody sat at the dinner table until the father had taken his seat. Lola Zinn was 16 years old when he came to this country. And he came with nothing.

That was how they did it in those days: the family would gather enough money to send one member to South Africa and that member would build up enough money to bring the next member out. Then the two would work to bring the third out, and so on. They came over on those belching steamships from London, spending weeks at sea until they finally landed in the *Goldene Medine*, this golden place.

My father's brother was the first to come. He worked for years to bring Lola and the goal was to eventually bring their parents and two sisters. But my father got tuberculosis soon after he arrived and he was sick for ages – years even. His brother had to support him. So it took them a long time to be able to afford trips for the others. They eventually managed to bring the older of the two sisters to Cape Town, but by the time they could bring the others...it was too late. The Second World War had broken out. My father's parents and his younger sister died in the Nazi camps.

We later found out that his younger sister could have been saved. She was deported to the camps, and underwent the infamous 'selections' when the Nazi guards indicated by a flick to the left or the right who would live and who would die. She was young and healthy enough to go in the direction of life. But she chose not to leave her mother's side, and stayed with her when they were sent in the wrong direction – to their death.

We know about this story because a friend of hers survived the camps. A German officer helped her to stay alive, although she underwent terrible abuse and was sterilised. She came out to South Africa after the war and told the family what had happened...

I don't think my father ever recovered from what happened to his family. He didn't talk to me about it – he didn't talk to anyone about it – but I think he probably blamed himself and was plagued by 'what ifs'. What if he hadn't gotten sick and had to spend money on his own recovery? What if he had worked harder and earned quicker? I think he lived with guilt for the rest of his life, and it tainted everything he did. He felt driven to make something of himself, to be successful and show the world. Unlike my mother who was born in this country, my father was always displaced, always searching for his right to be here and be respected.

By 1960, he was really starting to get things right. He had always worked in the furniture business and around that time he eventually opened his own bedroom furniture manufacturer in Woodstock. I used to go visit him at his factory and I was so proud that I was the daughter of the boss! I'd sit at the front desk with a packet of Chilli Chips and a tin of Pepsi from the little cafe next door – the darkest, dirtiest shop which also sold fried fish wrapped in wax newspaper. I remember the place smelled of stale sunflower oil...

Oh...things were so much simpler in those times. We could get Wicks bubble gum or two Chappies for a cent! And that's when we weren't creating our own sweets like eating jelly powder straight from the box or making caramel by boiling tins of condensed milk for hours. We bought fish straight from the street! The fish cart would come down the road with the man blowing his horn and we would run out to greet him and his horse. And the driver would say in Afrikaans "*Hey, gaan sê vir jou ma daars vis,*" and we would run inside to tell our mothers. And no-one bothered about sell-by dates and burglar alarms. Yes, everything was so much simpler.

So I really messed things up for my parents when I fell pregnant. It was an extremely complicated problem for them. And I suppose it happened at a time when my father was just coming into his own...

If I look at it that way, I can almost understand his rage. I couldn't understand it then and it terrified me more than anything, but I can see now why he reacted that way. I was threatening everything he had worked so hard for.

So he shouted until his eyes were bloodshot and his smooth, unlined face was wrinkled with anger. My mother kept *shtum*; she knew better than to open her mouth. And I cried until I could hardly breathe.

We drove home and I ran to my room, still crying. I could hear my parents in the entrance hall, and the sound of dialling. After a few moments, I heard my father say: "You'd better get over here. Quick." Half an hour later, Max arrived.

My mother called me into the lounge and shut the door so that Flora wouldn't overhear our conversation. And then my father turned on Max: "How could you do this to us? After all the hospitality we've shown you! We welcome you into our home and this is how you repay us!" He was pacing up and down, clutching his hands behind his back as if he didn't trust them. "You will be our downfall, Max Langman. I have a good name in this town – a name I've worked hard to build – and now you come along and throw it all away. And for what? For nothing!"

Max waited for my father to stop pacing and then he said: "I am sorry. But we'll get married. I love Lynette and we'll get married and raise this child. That's what we'll do".

My father just snorted at that response. "Married? Ha! What do you know about love?" he shouted. "You're just a *pisha*. Not even 20 years old. Wet behind the ears. How are you going to live, hey? You don't have a proper job – you're just an articled clerk who earns pittance. So how will you support a family? Please! You know nothing about marriage and love."

And with that wave of his hand, he disposed of our plan, loose as it was. And I didn't know what else to do but cry. It was the only response I could come up with. I couldn't argue with him – his word was law. You didn't argue with your parents, especially not when you were merely a teenager. So crying was my only outlet.

After a few moments, my father seemed to have made a conscious decision to calm down. He simply looked at us and said, in a normal tone, "Well, we'll just have to sort something out," to which my mother screeched: "Sort something out? What are you going to sort out? The baby's coming in a month!"

But my father just shrugged and opened the door. We were dismissed.

Max:

I remember getting a phone call at work from Lynette's father. He wanted to see me straight away.

Everything just blew up then. When I got to their house, I realised that I was in a stranglehold. There was nothing I could do, no-one I could turn to. I said we'd get married but I knew we couldn't afford to. I mean, I earned R30 per month as an articled clerk and to make up for the pitiful salary, I worked as a clerk at the racecourse on Saturdays and public holidays for R10 a day. All in all, I'd come out with around R80 each month. In those days, you needed at least R300 per month to live. Plus I was putting myself through varsity...

If you come from no background and you are earning peanuts...how are you going to afford to get married, let alone have a baby?



Lynette:

I hibernated for the next two days. It was a weekend, so I didn't have to go to work, and I didn't leave my room until Sunday lunchtime when my mother insisted that I come downstairs to greet her guests. It was the usual crowd: the Cohens, the Greens, the du Toits. Uncle Mike was there too but he didn't say much. I don't think he knew how to handle my parents' pain and disappointment. He hadn't even been able to spell the words out to them when he first suspected what was wrong with me – he let the radiologist bear that burden. Still, he was one of their oldest and closest friends and, at this point, the only other person who knew the truth.

I couldn't play nice with my parents' friends. For them, it was just a normal Sunday lunch, special only because of the smoked salmon which my mother had managed to get. For me, it was anything but normal. I just kept to myself and read my book in the corner, waiting for something but not quite sure what...

That night, I was summoned to my parents' bedroom. My mother closed the door behind me and then sat down on the little padded stool in front of her dressing table. My father stood at the top of the bed, holding onto a wing of their carved wooden headboard.

"Lynette," my father said, "we've come to a decision." He was talking quietly and calmly. None of the vein-popping anger of two days ago. His calm was almost more unsettling. "You will move to the du Toit's garden cottage in Camps Bay. You will leave immediately and stay there until your confinement. The baby will be given up for adoption."

"But..."

"We are not telling Max's parents about this. We are not telling anyone about this. The du Toits, Uncle Mike and your Aunty Milly are the only ones who know and who will ever know. They understand how important confidentiality is and we trust them to keep quiet. The less people who know about this, the better. Uncle Mike's nurse, Rosie, will come and live with you. She'll help look after you and will keep you company until you have the baby. She won't tell anybody about this either. The du Toits have kindly offered the use of their cottage which is empty right now, and we've accepted. You leave this evening, so go and pack a suitcase."

And that was that. As I said, when my father made a decision, it was the law. I couldn't appeal. It was final.

Years later, my Auntie Milly told me that she had tried to get my mother to reconsider. She had said to her, "Tilly, this will be your first grandchild!" My mother had been upset but firm, convinced that she and my father were doing the right thing. And Auntie Milly kept her peace for 40 years.

I was probably in shock after my father's pronouncement. Of all the outcomes, I hadn't expected to be sent away to have the baby. And I suppose the du Toits were my parents' only real option: they weren't Jewish, so they wouldn't blurt out the secret to the community and risk exposing the story; but they were close enough friends that my father felt he could approach them and trust them. Anyway, at the time I didn't analyse it. I just followed my father's orders and went off to pack.

To tell you the truth, a small part of me felt relieved. The burden of my secret had been unloaded, and I was still standing. No more pants with safety pins and cream crackers for supper! Plus, I had never lived on my own before and as a naïve teenager, I was quite excited at the prospect. No one ever went to Camps Bay – if we wanted beaches, we went to Muizenberg, where the water was warmer and we had a flat of our own. And there wasn't much to do in Camps Bay either, which at the time was purely residential with just a few small houses. So we didn't go there for social reasons. It may as well have been another city! When I looked at it that way, this was actually going to be quite an adventure...

*Lynette must have noticed some incredulity in my expression because she starts talking quickly, almost jabbering, as if she's making excuses for her response or placating guilt. Perhaps she's trying to help herself understand.*

*But I find her story difficult to comprehend. I can't imagine simply accepting a decree like Lola Zinn's. And I can't imagine my parents deciding to send me away like that.*

*I feel frustrated by the inability to put my own questions to Lynette's parents. I crave their perspective on everything I've been told. So I turn to someone who, I imagine, will represent*

*some of Lola and Tilly's thinking, someone who knew that era and knew them. And who might help me understand.*

*My grandmother is almost 90 years old. In fact, she could be somewhat younger or older because her year of birth has been debatable ever since she came to this country on the Union Castle Line from Southampton in 1929 and lost her birth certificate in the process. It is through her that I am related to Lynette. She is Lynette's aunt, Lola Zinn's sister-in-law. It was her husband – my late grandfather – who was Lola's brother, the one who brought Lola to South Africa and supported him during his illness. It was her husband who lost his parents and sister in the Holocaust. If anyone can help me grasp Jewish South Africa in the 1960s, it is she.*

*I take her to the Waterfront and we walk along the harbour wall, watching a seal splash around the anchored boats. Touts are waving their pamphlets in our faces, selling boat trips to Robben Island and sunset cruises to Clifton beach. We sit on a bench near the Belgian restaurant. I can smell waffles and seagulls.*

*My grandmother always dresses like the Queen Mum – with a hat, a matching handbag, and unsurpassed refinement. People – strangers – smile when they see her. Her accent is still inflected with the shtetls of Eastern Europe: her 'a' is our 'e', so 'married' sounds like 'merried' with a guttural roll of the r in the middle. Her manner of speech strips away decades and continents.*

Grandma:

Duhling, so tell me, are you still going to write that story about that terrible *shande*?

How do you mean things are different these days? Oi, what an embarrassment to get pregnant when you are not merried! I think it's terrible. I mean, what it must have done to Lola and Tilly. I didn't know about it at the time, but now that I know – it's so emberressing. For the whole family. It brings a shame on the whole family. Yes, even me.

What would I have done if that happened to one of my children? G-d forbid. That's all I can say. I don't know. It's a terrible situation to find yourself. Yes, maybe it's terrible that they sent her away, but maybe I would have done the same? Who can say? You have to think what it was like for them.

I remember those days well. I mean, as well as I can now that I'm an old woman. You have to forgive me if I can't remember certain things exactly. You know what they say in Yiddish [*winks*]: *Wen Ich bin geven yung bin ich geven shtark vi a ferd, yetst iz di shtarkhayt avek un der ferd iz geblayben!* [When I was young I was as strong as a horse. Now the strength has gone and the horse is left!]

In those days, Lola and Tilly were the most fashionable of all of us. He was always so well groomed – looked like Clarke Gable, they used to say. I thought so. He dressed magnificently and was as neat as can be. Quite a dancer too! And his wife was beautiful. She was the first person to serve smoked salmon at her house. It was a big deal, you know. They always had parties and lunches. Lots of friends. And he had his own business, after he worked for Mr Kernoff. So this must have been terrible for them. Tooooo terrible. Such high society people at that time, it would have been the worst kind of *shande*.

No of course she didn't argue with her parents. Children had respect for their elders. They didn't argue because we always knew best. Well, maybe sometimes we didn't know that well, but children did not argue. And anyway, how would that have helped Lynette? She couldn't have done anything else. I knew one other girl this happened to and it ruined her. Everybody knew about it. Too terrible. A tragedy.

If it had happened to my child, I'm sure I would have sent her away to take care of it. I would have wanted nothing to do with it. I don't know, you can't say. Things are different now. But one thing is for sure: I would not have written a book about it!

*My grandmother's reticence at having the story written, at having it reflect on her family, is indicative of the times. She shares Lola and Tilly's apparent esteem for the reputable name, the honourable legacy. Yet I know that Lola himself ultimately transgressed this very*

*doctrine. Lynette is reluctant to talk about Lola's crime; she has forgotten or diluted most of the facts and points instead to Max as a reliable source.*

Max:

I didn't question Lola and Tilly's decision. I knew there was no alternative that I could offer. I mean, you have to be practical. I simply had no money! And no-one I could ask for money. We really had no choice.

After that, I just blocked it out and put it behind me. I had to get on with my life and find a future. There was no choice and no discussion.

Only a few years later, Lola's whole fraud case came down. When you think about it now, it certainly is ironic that there he was, preaching morals and good values to us while all the while he was thieving behind people's backs. I didn't think about it like that at the time, though. I was too busy trying to get on with my life and earn a living ...

You see Lola worked for Kernoff furniture manufacturers, but he felt he wasn't getting anywhere there. So he went to work at another small factory which was struggling at the time, but where he'd have room to grow. He became a partner there.

Kernoff went bust because Lola had been the heart of the business. So two years later, Lola bought Kernoff out of bankruptcy...But he bought it with no money.

Lola and his new partner had no capital, but they were able to buy the business because of who they were. The local furniture trade was essentially controlled by Jews in those days and so they gave Lola a tremendous credit reference and he was able to buy the business with money that wasn't his.

After a few years, Lola started with all that fancy living. Cars, clothing, wining and dining. And that took money! To support the lifestyle, he took from the business. He had gone in on borrowed money and then stole, so the only way to fund the business was to borrow more money. He got an outside accountant to create a profitable balance sheet and after doing that for him a few times, the accountant was eventually stuck – he couldn't get out of doing it. The

borrowed money, the interest on the money, the fancy living...it became a bigger and bigger bullshit story, growing over seven to eight years. And then everything jackknifed.

There was a fire in the factory and the bubble burst. He couldn't get an insurance settlement for the fire and the creditors came in. They discovered a whole lot of discrepancies in the books, liquidated the business and handed the case over to the police.

You see, no-one thought Lola had the brains to run a sophisticated fraudulent operation. But he had the whole thing organised, right down to a false address for the documentation. The scale was enormous. I went to see the detective and he said to me: "Do you have three months? Because that's how long it will take to look through this," and he showed me a file that was this thick [*forms a 'c' shape with his thumb and forefinger*]. The whole thing cost thousands upon thousands of Rands.

Lola pleaded guilty to stop all the gory detail coming out. And he convinced himself that he'd just get a rapping over the knuckles...Instead, he was sentenced to 16 years in jail! No-one could believe it.

I went to court for most of the trial and I was there on the day of the sentencing. I went down below afterwards and found him in the cells. They were keeping him in Roeland Street, in a holding cell, as they were waiting to charge the accountant who had assisted him. That poor guy went to jail for five years even though he had never gotten a cent out of it all. He had to sell everything to pay the shippers back. It was actually a travesty of justice, that he lost everything.

But as I was saying...I made up some story in Roeland Street jail so they let me down below to see Lola. That man's nature to adapt to a situation was unbelievable. The policeman would walk into the room and he would jump to attention. He knew exactly what he needed to do to survive there.

On appeal, Lola's sentence was reduced to 12 years. Ultimately, he only served 20 months.

He was in Victor Verster prison in Paarl and he got out early for health reasons. But during that time, he didn't live a bad life. When Lynette's sister Maureen got engaged, we even had a

party at the prison. There were at least 70 people! No booze, but lots of people. The thing was catered and all!

Tilly's standard of living didn't really change after Lola went to jail, although I made her get a job and move to a smaller flat. So I was the big shit! But we were helping to support her so I thought it was only right that she make a few slight adjustments. She didn't need a whole big flat all to herself!

The family put up a barrier to all of this. They had to find a way to get on with their lives because the scandal was so huge. I mean, this was headline news! 'Man sentenced for R5m fraud.' Splashed all over Cape Town. It was horrendous. But they all banded together and pulled through. They tried hard to retain their old view of their father. Lola was always so wonderful to everyone, showering gifts and spoiling the grandchildren. I would say, "This is not his money," but they all used to get upset with me for saying that. They supported their father and didn't want to focus on the negative.

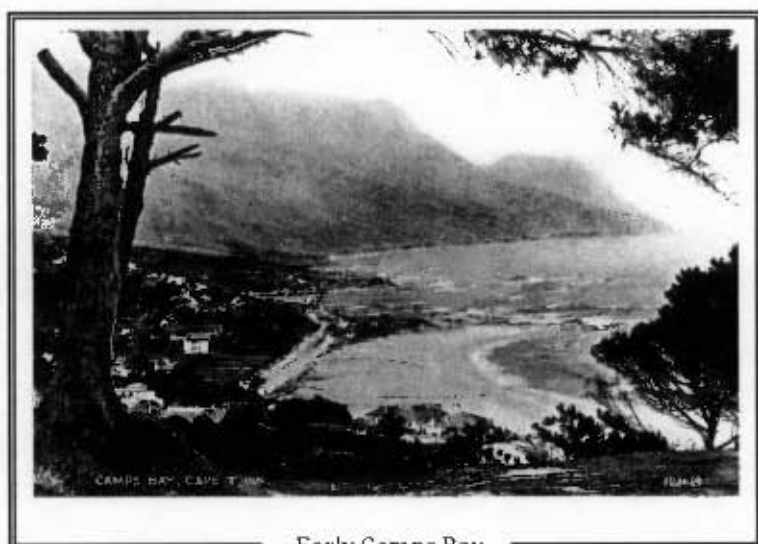
Yes, it definitely is ironic that he lambasted us for shaming his name when he did a pretty good job of it all by himself. But as I said, I didn't think about it way back then. And for Lynette, well, she had other things to worry about...



***Vorster broadside  
is expected tonight***

# APPEAL ON LOLA ZINN SENTENCE





Early Camps Bay

PHOTOGRAPH SOURCE: NATIONAL ARCHIVES, CAPE TOWN REPOSITORY

## THE RIGHT THING

**T**he lobby of Lynette's apartment building is thick with sea mist and the fluorescent lights are already blazing in anticipation of the day's brevity. Outside, a flock of swallows makes a late departure in the direction of Robben Island. They do not turn back.

In Lynette's flat, the oil heaters are popping and ticking as they reach temperature. Lynette has shed her winter jersey and is sitting at the dining room table making notes. She smiles when I walk in and for a second, she looks quite the innocent young girl – wide-eyed and expectant, like a doe.

Lynette:

My parents told the world that I had an ovarian cyst. Everyone, except the handful who knew the truth, believed I was to be away for the next five weeks or so, sent off to stay with family in Kimberley where I could recuperate. It was no stretch of the imagination. Sick people often went off to drier climates to recover – from asthma, bronchitis, whatever – and we had cousins in Kimberley so the destination was plausible. And no-one would really discuss this ‘female sickness’ – people could hardly even say the word ‘ovarian’ without blushing. So my parents’ excuse would keep me out of sight, without arousing suspicion, until I could get rid of the baby. I took sick leave from work and told them I would be going immediately. I was a secretary – dispensable – so I didn’t have much trouble there. My boss understood.

I had been so excited to live a life free of deception, where I could just be myself without all the denial of the last few months. But with my parents’ ovarian cyst story, there came a whole new set of lies I’d have to stick to.

I lived in a cottage at the bottom of the du Toit’s garden...

*She pulls out the piece of paper on which she had been making notes, and starts drawing rough lines, sketching the layout of the little cottage and becoming absorbed in the illustrations.*

*Her new home was nestled amongst trees, mulch and small mounds of rough earth that looked like bald men’s heads. When the wind blew, the big oak would tap on the roof, dropping bits of bark and old acorns. Her world shrank to the narrow borders of these grounds, revolving quietly around the little cottage where she and Rosie the nurse shared everything, from meals and conversation, to old books and the one bed.*

*With little to stimulate her, she became aware of the sounds of her cottage haven. The click click click of Rosie’s knitting, like fingernails tapping against each other. The soft whoosh of pages turning as she devoured the romance novels that made her believe in happy endings, or scoured the travel books that carried her off to faraway places. The spit and sizzle of eggs frying in the pan. The crashing of the waves, rolling towards Camps Bay beach like heralds in a great army of foaming white horses and seaweed kings. The crunch of*

*gravel in the driveway as her parents or Auntie Milly arrived to visit, smelling of the outside world and laden with biscuits, books, and toilet paper. The sickly sweetness of the body cream which Rosie would faithfully apply to her body each evening before bedtime. The quiet rise and fall of her breath late at night, when she would lie awake and wonder what was to become of her.*

The days rolled into one another. I didn't really leave the cottage, not even to walk on the beach. I had to keep out of sight as much as possible. We played silly board games, like Ludo and Snakes & Ladders, which we found in the one cupboard, and I read heaps of books. And Rosie and I would chat for hours. She was my saviour.

I lived for the weekends, when I had visitors. On Saturday mornings, my parents would arrive. On the dot at ten o'clock. My father and I would spend the first few minutes unpacking the groceries from the boot and stashing them in our kitchenette. I was always glad to see the little treats they'd thrown in for the week: Kit Kat chocolate bars; glucose sucking sweets; marshmallow fish that I saved for when Max came to visit – they were his favourite and I knew how much he loved them! My parents would often bring little nick-nacks from life at home, like a picture Jennifer had drawn for me at school and which they'd promised to send to Kimberley. Then we would sit down to some tea and rusks, or orange Lecol, and they'd fill me in on the week.

Conversation with my parents was always stilted in those weeks. I felt angry but unable to express it, sad but afraid to show it. I couldn't really take it out on anyone: my parents would never have tolerated that, and I didn't want to burden Rosie who was a real friend. So we kept everything light and superficial. We talked about the weather, and Uncle Mike, and my mother's bets at the horse-racing. We talked about my dad's factory, my sisters' progress at school, and what we'd all eaten for dinner the night before. But we never talked about the baby.

Max was probably the only one I could really talk to but he wasn't the most communicative person, and I didn't want to be a drag. He would arrive soon after lunchtime, when my parents had already left.

He tried to come every weekend, although it wasn't easy for him. And he also brought treats – the fun kind, like Cracker Jack caramel popcorn and Dutch Motto sweets with the little messages on them like 'I love you.' I ate a lot of sweets in those days!

Max had to work hard to keep up the pretence, especially with his parents who still did not know the truth and were really concerned for my health. They would write me letters which Max offered to post. They probably thought it rude that I never replied from Kimberley!

But he stuck by me. Really stuck by me, even though my father had virtually written him off. We didn't talk about marriage any more. We thought it was a lost cause. In fact, we didn't really talk about the future at all. We just tried to deal with each day as it came. So when he visited, we would walk around the garden if it wasn't raining, or huddle inside if it was.

But by 5 o'clock in the evening, he had to leave. And then it was just Rosie and me again. She would make dinner and we would discuss the day. She was a great *skinderbek*, so gossiping was her all-time favourite activity. She could talk far into the night, telling me the real story behind this one, and the honest truth about that one, even though I didn't know any of the people she talked about! Her Cape Coloured accent became particularly heavy when she was in the midst of a good rumour – '*weeeeet djy maar wat?!*' – and she always made me laugh. Of course she was as cut off from the world as I was. She also had to sign up to keep Cape Town's biggest secret. But she was a good source of secrets herself; after all, she was a nurse in a private medical practice! She was never malicious, though, or disrespectful of people. Her stories were just a great way to pass the time. And on the weekends, the rush of air from the real world and the Cape Argus newspapers that my parents brought would reinvigorate her. So Saturday nights were always a verbal feast!

Rosie was my soulmate. I didn't even think about the fact that I was living with – sharing a bed with – a non-white woman in the early days of apartheid. She was not a colour, or a statistic. She was my companion and my friend. I couldn't have survived without her.

And so the days seemed to pass. On the surface, everything was calm – even to the point of boring. But underneath it all, was a thick layer of fear. I would lie awake at night after Rosie had gone to sleep, wondering what it would be like to give birth. I knew that my mother had been in labour with Jennifer for two whole days, but I was too scared to ask her what that was

like. I had seen movies where women lay writhing, hurling abuse and screaming. So that's what I imagined would happen to me. I had no real idea about what to expect. All I had were nightmares and ignorance. No-one spoke about it; not even Rosie. No-one warned me, or comforted me. No one bought me books or sent me to antenatal classes! And I didn't ask.

But I was silently terrified. So I did the only thing I knew how to do: I went into denial. I imagined that I would just stay there in the cottage, and the baby would stay put. There would be no labour of any kind, just a permanent state of pregnancy. I told you I have this ability to block things out...That's what I did. It was my only defence. I mean *[laughs in disbelief]* it's ridiculous. But that's what I did.

*I stop her there. I shake my head, trying to sort through the kaleidoscope of conflicting images, voices, faces. It had been one thing imagining an 18-year old Jewish girl growing up in suburban Cape Town in the '50s and '60s. But it was a whole other thing to imagine this girl pregnant, living the life of an outcast, in an area of the city which today is a bustling, wealthy, often-photographed social centre.*

*The sun has only just begun to set as Lynette and I drive down Victoria Road in the direction of Camps Bay. The Atlantic Ocean is on our right, blocked at regular intervals by the walls and garage doors of the sumptuous Clifton homes which perch on the cliffs. Lion's Head rears up to our left, abutting the now-crimson slopes of Table Mountain. The joggers and power walkers are out in droves, some pounding the road with serious concentration, others doing more socialising than exercising. Carlucci's Deli is overflowing – the tall bistro tables on the pavement are clogged with frappé glasses, and a lone waiter snakes his way through the platinum blondes with their gel nails and black BMW X5s. We stop as a truck collects the last load of rubble from the building site of yet another seaside apartment block. I always worry that the mountain will revolt one day and shake off the construction which blasts its boulders and strips away its granite. But tonight, it's holding firm.*

*We approach Camps Bay and, uncharacteristically, not a breath of wind stirs the palm trees which line the beachfront. The front strip of restaurants and bars have turned on their fairy lights and cranked up the volume. I can hear strains of 'chilled ambient' house music,*

*dulled now and always by the rumble of the waves just metres away. There are more dogs than people on the beach at this hour, all running gleefully free of the leash. "It was nothing like this then," says Lynette, "absolutely nothing like this."*

*The traffic has slowed to a crawl as pedestrians crisscross the road. We are still on Victoria Road, and she directs me to carry on past the end of the strip. We pass the tidal pool where groups of school kids from the townships often come to swim. It's quiet now. "None of this was here," she says. "There were just a few houses and a grocer." A little further along we turn left into a small road which runs up towards the mountain and then veers off. "The house was further up the hill, just before the turn in the road. Number 17." We drive on, slowing down as we approach the bend. Lynette is searching the numbers on the left. "All the walls have changed. There used to be a thick hedge around the garden." But there is no greenery here, just high concrete barriers, painted in the currently fashionable earth tones. "I don't know," she says. "I think it was this one. It must have been this one."*

*We get out to peer through the electronic gates of the house marked 17. There is hardly a garden, and certainly no garden cottage. Just a modern double storey with curved walls and reflective glass. "They must have razed the house and rebuilt it. Nothing is as it was," she says, looking around. "The driveway ran round the side and the cottage was down towards the far end. The main house was quite big: slate roof, wooden windows and a front door which had a centre pane of glass with a net curtain hanging over it. And the cottage was probably a converted garage. It was just one big room with a double bed, a kitchenette with a hot plate, and a round wooden table with four chairs. Two armchairs as well. And a small bathroom. Very basic. But the garden was beautiful – it had lots and lots of hydrangeas – you know, Christmas flowers. And there was a huge patch of lawn in the middle, between the cottage and the main house. But look at it now. It's all just house." She has a worried frown and seems to be checking her memory. "No, it's all changed...Except..." She points.*

*In the far corner, peeping through the shadows of the 12 Apostles, are the boughs of the old oak tree.*

Lynette:

It had been a night like all the others. Uneventful. I had had trouble falling asleep and it seemed I'd just managed to drop off when I woke with a start. The bed was soaking wet.

I shook Rosie to wake her up. "What's going on?" I shouted. Around me, there was a pool of water which soaked the linen. "I think I've wet myself," I said, absolutely ashamed. I couldn't imagine how I'd done that.

Rosie took one look at the sodden sheets and said: "You haven't wet yourself. Your waters have broken – your labour is starting."

I didn't know the first thing about broken waters. No one had ever told me that I should expect to leak like a cracked pipe. I jumped out of the bed and stood dripping in the dark. 'How can the baby be coming now?' I thought. 'I'm just not ready for it. I don't think I'll ever be ready for it.'

I changed my clothes and sat on the couch while Rosie phoned Uncle Mike. My lower back had been aching for the last day or so and now there were searing jabs of pain – like someone was sticking a hot poker in my back. I didn't know what was going on and I didn't know what to expect. I just waited for the agony.

Rosie had organised to meet Uncle Mike at the Booth Memorial Hospital and by the time she was ready to get going, the pain was becoming really bad. It was like sharp stabs from all directions. She had strong arms, and helped me to the door and then into her little red Austin. I remember the car took a while to start because the night was freezing. But she finally gunned the engine and sped out of the driveway.

*Now, in my car, we follow the route she took. We head up towards Camps Bay Drive – a smooth road, with broad shoulders, that hugs the mountainside. It is Camps Bay's main thoroughfare to the City Bowl.*

There was a clock on Rosie's dashboard. The light from the streetlamps would catch the fluorescent second hand and I remember watching it tick. It was Wednesday, 9 August 1961. Mid-winter. And the wind was blowing hard.

*It's been a wet winter so far, and the roadside is lush. Down below is the verdant forest of The Glen which forms a heavy canopy of trees between the mountain and the sea. We are driving fast, sweeping round wide corners as Camps Bay drops away beneath us.*

It's only taken us five minutes to get to the top of the pass now. It must have taken us at least ten minutes back then. Which felt like ten hours. The pain was coming harder and faster and Rosie kept saying, "Breathe nice and slow. Breathe nice and slow." But I couldn't.

*We approach the roundabout where the road splits: straight to continue down into the bowl of the city; hard left for the spiral of Kloof Nek into Clifton; soft left to head up Signal Hill for sundowners and a popular lookout spot; or right for Table Mountain and the cable car. We go straight.*

You know that feeling you get when you can't believe that something is actually happening to you? It's almost an out-of-body experience: you look down on yourself and your situation, and you can't believe you're in it. That's how I felt. When I wasn't clutching my stomach in pain, I was breathing hard and wishing that I was anywhere but there, doing anything but that.

*We coast down towards the city, framed on one whole side by Table Bay and the endless expanse of ocean. It's almost dark and the sea is as still as if it were painted. The city is settling down while nightlights blink themselves awake. We take a road which twists through the suburbs of Higgovale, Tamboerskloof and Gardens, through houses heaped like frosting on the folds of the mountain. The roads here are narrow, and they slow us down. We approach the reservoir which feeds the city with distilled rain and water collected from mountain springs. It's a well-known landmark, bordered by palm trees and stately old homes with pink walls and broekie lace. We are just seconds from the hospital.*

Booth Memorial took up the corner of a block, across the road from De Waal park, just on the slopes of Table Mountain. It wasn't a very big hospital, but it had a maternity section. Uncle Mike probably had some influence there. And of course they wanted me to be somewhere



where no-one would know me. I couldn't go to a main maternity hospital like the Vincent Pallotti. I had to be out of the way.

*These days Booth Memorial is primarily an orthopaedic and geriatric hospital. When you drive past, it doesn't look like the place where babies were born. A glass corridor juts out from the entrance on the De Waal park end. Usually, the corridor and the parking lot outside are lined with people in wheelchairs. They always look abandoned, as if they have been put there by force and instructed to get some fresh air. I have never been inside, but the place seems to have an air of hopeless misery.*

When we finally arrived, I was rushed into a room and someone helped me remove my clothes. A nurse said to me: "We're going to prep you now." I didn't know what she was talking about. "It means that we're going to shave you," she said. I couldn't imagine why or where they were going to shave me. I only ever shaved my legs and underarms, and I didn't see why that mattered.

So I got a real fright when the nurse put her cold hand on my thigh and took a razor to my pubic area. I was horrified. And embarrassed. I looked away.

After that, they wheeled me into the labour ward, screaming with pain. I saw white and green heads all busy in the room. Someone put a thick sanitary towel between my legs and checked the fluid that smeared on it. Everything was happening all at once. I heard a man's voice above the others and then "Lynette, I'm Dr Shapiro, the gynaecologist." He stood at my head and smiled as he introduced himself. He had a kind smile.

Dr Shapiro was my mother's gynaecologist. I hadn't ever met him but I knew that he was the one who delivered Jennifer, my younger sister. And it's not as if there was time to make conversation with him; I was too busy trying to survive the pain. So the doctor disappeared to the other end of the bed. I heard mumbling and then one nurse's comment: "Dr Shapiro, I don't like what I see on this sanitary towel. This green discharge is not right."

Contractions were ripping me apart at this point. I couldn't breathe even though people kept telling me to, and I didn't know how much more I could handle of the agony. I gripped

the sides of the bed so hard that my knuckles felt as if they were going to burst out of their skin.

Dr Shapiro, looking very serious, came back to the top of the bed and said: "My girlie, I'm going to have to do an emergency Caesarean." Well, I didn't really know what that was or how it worked. I just stared at him. "The umbilical chord is around the baby's neck, and the baby is in distress," he said. "So I'm going to put you under anaesthetic and deliver the baby as quickly as possible."

I didn't know whether to panic about the baby or be ecstatic about the word 'anaesthetic.' Anything to be rid of this pain! But I didn't have much time to think about it. Before I knew it, I was out...

Max:

I don't remember the birth of the baby as vividly as Lynette does. I've blocked most of it out. Of course I didn't see the baby. And I don't like hospitals so it would have been difficult for me to spend very much time there.

What I do remember is that Lynette's parents were waiting for her when she came out of surgery. I was there too but I waited at the side while the nurses did their thing. Of course she was groggy and disoriented but I know that the first thing Lynette said when she opened her eyes was: "What did I have?"

The nurse told her it was a boy.

When she saw me, Lynette just burst into tears. No one else had said anything up to that point. But when she saw me, she couldn't contain herself. Still, no-one said anything but I knew what she was thinking and feeling. And there was nothing I could say to make it better. So I just held her hand and let her cry. I didn't know what else to do...

Lynette:

The days in the hospital were a nightmarish stupor. My room was right next-door to the nursery and I could hear the newborn babies crying. Even though I hadn't laid eyes on the child I'd given birth to, I was sure I could hear my own baby's cry above all the rest. At times, I

would fantasise about grabbing him and disappearing. But to where? There was just no-one and nothing that could help.

The nurses didn't seem to care for my situation and would breeze in and out of the room as if I wasn't even there. Except for one Sister who was older than the others and seemed to feel sorry for me. She would always come in with a smile, singing "I see the harbour lights", and make sure that I was as comfortable as she could make me.

At some point, a nurse brought me tablets to dry up the milk in my breasts. But not before they had starting aching. It was almost as if they were drawn to the hungry cries of the newborn baby next-door. And that was a feeling that even the tablets couldn't help. I wanted to nurse my son. But he wasn't mine to nurse.

As the days wore on and I remained in the nursing home, my milk began to dry. But my tears didn't. I cried for hours. Max would sit with me while I cried. He tried to comfort me, but I don't think there's anything anyone could have done. His one consolation was his constant reassurance: "We will get married. One day soon we will get married. And we'll have other children." He said it over and over.

The social worker came from the Adoption Society on the fourth day after the birth of my son.

"You're young," she said, soon after introducing herself and perching on the edge of my bed. "You are doing the right thing. Believe me, this is best for the child."

I couldn't see how. But she seemed so sure. So she proceeded to fill out form after form, eventually looking up from her papers to say: "I'm writing up the details of the child's birth. You will need to give him a name – just for the purposes of the form. And then you can sign."

A name? I hadn't thought of a name. What should it be? Should I name him after someone in the family? Or maybe someone famous. What should it be? Should it be a modern name, or a traditional one? I didn't know what to call him. "You can give him any name you want," she said again. "It's really just for the form."

So I named him David. David Zinn. No special reason. Just David – because I liked the name. Simple as that. 'David Zinn,' she wrote on the papers. And I signed.

*Lynette stayed in that hospital for ten days. The Caesarean Section was a severe operation and required lengthy recovery. She spent all ten days in the same room at the very end of the corridor, right next to the nursery. But she never saw the baby.*

*Her parents visited a few times. Her Auntie Milly often popped round. Max came every day. She cried most of the time. Until the day that Uncle Mike came to visit.*

Uncle Mike arrived one afternoon, when I had been in the hospital for about five or six days. He looked uncomfortable at first and tried to make small talk. But I wasn't in the mood. Eventually, he just came right out with what he had come to say:

"Lynette, I can just tell you this. The baby is going to a Jewish couple in Johannesburg. He will be well looked after I'm sure. You did the right thing."

It wasn't much information, but it was all he had and it was certainly more than I knew. I was relieved to have even that little bit of knowledge about the fate of my child. I asked him many more questions. Who were the couple? Did I know them? What kind of people were they? Did they have other children? When were they fetching him? And so on and so on. The questions all came tumbling out, but he didn't know any more than he'd already told me. Still, I felt better somehow, just knowing that little bit.

When Uncle Mike left that afternoon, I got out of bed. Of course I'd gone to the bathroom over the days, quick outings that lasted only as long as they had to, but I hadn't spent any other time out of bed. So I got up, and walked round to the small window that looked up towards De Waal Park and the reservoir. I think I expected the world to have changed somehow. But it looked much the same. There were still people jogging along the reservoir-edge, cars driving on the Oranjezicht roads, clouds swathing the top of Table Mountain. Everything was normal.

Then I walked round to the mirror, and looked at myself for the first time in days. I was thin. Thinner than I had ever been. Even thinner than before the pregnancy started. How ironic. I had to lose a soul to lose weight!

And then I got back into bed.

Not long after that, on the tenth day after I gave birth to David, my parents came to collect me from the nursing home. I was taken out to the car in a wheel chair, even though I could walk – ‘No miss. It’s hospital policy.’ My mother carried my bag and my father opened the car door. They looked immaculate, as ever, dressed for the occasion no matter what the occasion.

“This was for the best, Lynette,” was all they said to me, “this was for the best.”

Everyone kept telling me that. I had done the right thing. This was all for the best. This was the right thing for the baby. Ugh [*shakes her head*].

I lowered myself into the back seat and my father closed the door. He shifted the car into gear, looked back once more at the hospital, and drove off. He never spoke of David again.

University of Cape Town



Tilly and Milly

## SECOND SKIN

**L**ynette:

I think I went into a state of mourning. That's what it was. I had a personality change after I gave David away and came out of hospital. I wasn't interested in parties and flirting anymore. I didn't care about socialising and dressing up. I felt like an outsider who had grown up faster than her friends, and against her will.

After everything that had happened, I was too scared to let Max come near me, you know, physically. I was also not given much opportunity because for the rest of the pregnancy I lived with Rosie and after the baby was born, my parents didn't give us much chance of being alone – they were too scared that it could happen again. So our physical relationship definitely changed.

Of course the lies weren't over. If anything, they had just begun. People would ask me if I was feeling better, or what Kimberley was like. And I'd have to go along with it, when all I wanted to do was crawl up in my bed and hide. I'd catch glimpses of my new thin self in the mirror and wish for that bump again. I spent hours in the bath, running my fingers over the scar on my stomach and thinking about David.

My friends were happy to have me back, and they kept inviting me to parties and socials. When Max and I did manage to drag ourselves there, I would just retreat to a corner and watch everybody, thinking: 'What would you say if you knew?'

I always imagined that people had guessed the truth and were judging me. When I went into town for a check-up at the gynaecologist, I remember looking at the receptionist and thinking 'Does she know?' Of course, I could just as easily have been accompanying my mother to the doctor, but I was convinced that everyone was watching me. Dr Shapiro's comment didn't help either. "My girlie, you need to be very careful!" he said. I don't think he was talking about tearing stitches.

As far as my parents were concerned, things were very strange. I came out of hospital with this urge to redeem myself in their eyes. That need was stronger than any anger I felt towards them. But there was a strained distance between Max and my parents. Where before we would have spent Sunday lunches with them, or chatted for hours in the lounge, now we avoided being in the same room with them for too long. It didn't really come from my parents' side – they tried to make an effort with him when they realised he was there to stay, just as they tried to get things back to normal with me. But Max resisted. And I didn't know how to bridge the gap between them. So home became a minefield.

Other than Max, there was no-one I could really talk to. My parents had closed the door on "the matter" and the only others who knew the truth – Uncle Mike, Aunty Milly, Rosie, Dr Shapiro, and the du Toits – also seemed reluctant. At least in front of my parents, which was the only time I ever really saw them. And although I had close girlfriends, I couldn't confide in them. I was too ashamed – and besides, this was meant to be a big secret. So I dumped everything on Max. I'd constantly say things like: "I wonder how David is; I wonder what

David's new parents are like; David must be three, four, five, six weeks old now – I wonder what David looks like..."

Max would sit quietly while I went on and on about it. He never said much, never really engaged in conversation about David. I think he suffered his own guilt – silently, resolutely, like a man. "Try to put it out of your mind," he would say. "'I'm sure that Mike saw that the baby went to a good home. We can't keep dwelling on it – we need to think about *us* now."

But I couldn't just wipe David out of my mind. I was grieving, depressed. Although I was back at work and supposedly 'distracted', I couldn't stop thinking about him and the fact that I would never know him. I felt like I had failed him. And I couldn't understand why Max would still want me: "Do you feel that you have to stay with me now that we've had a child together?" I would ask him. "Do you really love me, or do you feel beholden to me?"

He always responded: "I love you, Lynette. If I didn't love you, I wouldn't be with you."

I desperately wanted to believe him. But my world was gloomy, filled with shame and longing. None of my old defences worked anymore. I didn't know how to find my old self.

So when my Auntie Milly invited me to accompany her on a trip to Durban, I eventually agreed because I thought it would do me good to get away. I wasn't thrilled about the idea, but she insisted and I relented.

We went by boat, which was a new experience for me. And it was my first time in Durban. We went for long walks on Umhlanga beach, dipped our toes in the warm Indian Ocean, ate the hottest curry I've ever tasted, and were in bed by eight o'clock every night. It was a good break from the madness of the last few months.

Auntie Milly was excellent company. She was quite different to my mother, much more light-hearted. She enjoyed a good joke and she was quite outgoing – the type of person who actually would have taken a cruise holiday by herself! We didn't talk much about David, but I didn't feel that she was avoiding the subject either. She wanted to give me the space to heal. "*Keyn einhore* you are fit and well now, and everything will be all right," she would say, in that Yiddish tradition of warding off the evil eye. I didn't think it was that simple, but she did help me feel better.



So the holiday was good. But it was the boat trip back that really started to change things for me...

He came from nowhere, my tall, dark stranger. Just suddenly appeared one day on the deck, smelling of Old Spice. He invited me to go for a drink. And that evening he came up to our table after dinner and introduced himself to Auntie Milly. He was very polite.

After that, we spent a lot of time together on the ship. He was excellent company – very bright and funny. He was a doctor. And Jewish too. Every mother's dream! He lived in Durban and was going to Cape Town to visit his mother.

I was definitely taken with him. Of course I did think about Max, but everything was so innocent and youthful that I didn't really think much beyond the end of the trip. Nothing happened anyway. It was just a lot of harmless flirtation.

And don't think that I forgot about David either. Not for a second. But something had shifted because there wasn't that sharp throbbing every time I thought about him anymore. It was more like a dull ache. Still painful, but tolerable.

I remember approaching Table Bay at the end of our four days at sea. The mountain was growing an inch a second and I felt a weight on my shoulders again. It's the feeling you get when you know there is no choice but to get back to real life. Like Sunday night before school.

I hadn't been home for three hours, and this guy was calling me on the phone. He wanted to see me, introduce me to his mother, take me out, treat me. He swept me, quite literally, off my feet – rushing over to meet my family and carrying me out to his car, like Bonny and Clyde! He took me to whichever fancy restaurant my heart desired and he made me feel like a princess.

Of course, my parents were enamoured with my new find: the Jewish doctor, the mystery man. Max was not.

I was confused. I loved Max – had never stopped – but this guy made me feel like a young girl again. With him, I wasn't the whining, miserable girlfriend with all that baggage. I was just a teenager having fun.

So I broke up with Max – told him that I was too confused to know what I wanted right now, and that I needed time to think things through. And for the next week, I was courted by the Durban guy. He had a car. He had money. It was exciting. But through all the glitz and glamour, that broken record was playing at the back of my head: ‘What would he think if he knew? He doesn’t know who I really am. He’d be too ashamed to be with me if he knew the truth.’ I didn’t say anything to him, though. I was too afraid.

It was fun, while it lasted. But ships do sail. So pretty soon, he was back on the boat. Back to Durban.

A week later, he wrote me a letter. It went something like this:

*‘Dear Lynette.*

*It was so wonderful spending time with you. It must have been fate that we met on that boat. And who am I to ignore fate? I think I’m in love with you.*

*I’m going to send you an airplane ticket to come to Durban – I must see you again.*

*Please accept my offer and visit with me soon.*

*All my love...’*

I showed the letter to my father, expecting him to be overjoyed with this attention from someone new – and a Jewish doctor *nogal*. But instead, I got this:

“Who does this boy think he is? What does he take me for – a fool? I do not send my daughter anywhere on appro!”

And that was the end of that.

It was like a break in time, that affair. And as soon as I was back in the real world, I realised what a mistake I had made breaking up with Max. I was just so confused, and I didn’t feel that I deserved his devotion. But I didn’t ever love that other guy the way I loved Max! I had to get him back.

I remember I phoned Max and just started blabbing about how sorry I was. He agreed to come over and we talked everything through. He made the occasional snide comment, like: “So did you like his fast car?” or “So where did he take you for dinner?” I knew he was jealous

and hurt. Who could blame him? He felt rejected, but he was prepared to listen to my excuses. And eventually he forgave me...

*When I talk to Max about this time in their lives, he can hardly remember it. He vaguely recalls the boat trip and Lynette's flirtatious break from their relationship, but shrugs it off. "Anyway," he says, "we didn't break up for long."*

*As for how he felt about living with the memory of David, he states candidly, although not without feeling: "I had no longing to see the baby. I knew what the reality was. You've got to be practical about things..."*

Lynette:

Even though I had Max back and my life seemingly on track, I still wasn't the same person. I was more serious, more contemplative, often overcome by shame and loss. David was constantly on my mind. And it was almost strange, because during the pregnancy, I hadn't been particularly attached to the baby inside me. I was too focused on denying its existence, then on the terror of my parents finding out and then on being sent away. But I think that the time in the cottage allowed me to connect with the baby. And then going through the pain of labour, not being allowed to see the child, and knowing that I never would, had changed me forever. I now had this overwhelming bond with him that could never be realised. And this terrible guilt at having given him away. And of course there was still the shame at having landed up in that situation at all. It was quite a burden – and a secret – to bear. Especially for the child that I was.

I still had nightmares about what people would say if they knew. I couldn't look at another teenager, or teenager's parent, without wondering and worrying. But it's funny how you get used to things. It was almost like wearing a second skin: much too tight to start, unbearable in fact, but slowly it stretched and the creases ironed out until it was a constant, though still uncomfortable, presence. And as I became used to living with the memory of David, and all that that brought with it, I became more resolved to win back my parents' approval. Max felt just as strongly about clearing the slate. But for different reasons. He wanted to let my parents know that they had been wrong. They were wrong about him, and assuming he was too young

or immature to take care of me. They were wrong about the baby, and assuming that we were too naïve to know and honour our responsibilities. They were wrong about us, and assuming that we knew nothing about love. He wanted to show them. So he did what I thought was the craziest thing...

Max:

You see, I had to write the final exams of my second year at university. Specifically, I was on my way to write Accounts II, and Lynette offered to come with me and wait in the car while I took the exam. She insisted on being there for moral support...

Lynette:

We arrived at the university and were greeted by the usual student scene: little groups of people lounging on the steps of Jameson Hall; smokers leaning against the pillars; people cramming at the last minute. Max parked the car outside Smuts Hall men's residence and I took out my book to read while I waited...

Max:

I went up to write the exam. I walked into the exam hall, sat down at my assigned seat and wrote my student number on the answer book. The invigilators handed out the paper and started the clock. I must have sat there for ten minutes, looking at the front of the paper, until I eventually stood and walked out. I just packed up my things and left...

Lynette:

The whole campus had quietened down as the exams began and I was sitting there reading my book. Suddenly, I looked up to turn the page and saw Max coming back down the stairs towards the car! I ran out towards him, convinced that something was terribly wrong.

"Come," he said. "We're leaving."

"What do you mean 'leaving'?" I asked. "You can't have finished writing yet!"

"No I haven't finished writing yet, but I have finished," he said. His jaw was set in that determined, don't-argue-with-me way.

But I was just so confused. Why had he not finished the paper? What had happened in there?

Max:

You know, I sat staring at the exam and all I could think was, 'What's the point of this?' This wasn't what I wanted from my life: studying, working a pitiful job with pitiful pay, slaving for years until I'd be able to afford anything decent. No, I wanted to get married and live an independent life which wasn't bogged down by student loans and financial dire straits. Studying wasn't getting me anywhere fast. So in my eyes, I had no choice. There was no in-between, no waiting it out just for the sake of the degree. I was either going to make a go of my life, or not. And I knew which one I wanted...

Lynette:

Max sped out of the parking lot and eventually spoke. He said: "I'll tell you what happened in there. I decided that I'm not going to continue with this. If we are ever going to get married, and be independent, and live the life we want to live, then I need to start earning money."

"But are you throwing away your degree?" I asked.

"Being here is not doing me any good. I need to get a proper job so that we can plan for our future."

I was shocked. I couldn't believe what had happened. And I felt responsible. Even though I desperately wanted to marry him, I didn't want it to be at the risk of him giving up his dreams.

But he took his hand from the steering wheel and put it on my knee, squeezing gently. "This is what I want Lynette," he said. "Trust me, this is right..."

Max:

Of course my parents were upset about it. But I concocted some story for them, something about me having lost interest in the degree or whatever. To me, it was clear: I simply had to take control and earn a decent living...

Lynette:

So Max went off and got a job – as a collector for a furniture company. And he was happy enough, content that he was working towards a future of his choice. I carried on with my secretarial work at the legal firm. Also happy enough. The months just rolled by. I turned 19.

I thought about David all the time. On the bus on the way to work. On the bus on the way home from work. I wondered what he looked like and if I'd ever recognise him if I saw him. Max and I talked about him when I could no longer bear to keep my thoughts to myself. No-one else ever mentioned him. And things with Max were good again. Better even than before David. I suppose it's true what they say – what doesn't kill you, makes you stronger.

A year passed. I lit a candle on the ninth of August. Just a small one, in my bedroom, with the door closed...

Some time after that, Max came over one day. I remember I had been in the kitchen eating red jelly powder straight from the box with a spoon. I can't believe we used to do that! But it was delicious: all fuzzy and sweet. So I had pink all over my mouth when I went to answer the doorbell for Max. Typical. That I should be a mess on a day like that.

I hadn't seen him much that week so we had lots to catch up on. We went into the lounge and shared the couch. Everyone else was out. I can't remember where they were.

We started chatting. I kept finding spots of red powder on myself! So for a while I didn't notice that Max was nervous and fumbly. Anyway, suddenly, in the middle of nowhere, he pipes up: "Lynette, how do you feel about being Mrs Langman?"

I must have stopped mid-sentence with my mouth hanging open. I couldn't think of anything to say. It came from nowhere – so unexpected, even though we had sometimes talked about it! So he had to ask again: "What do you think?"

All I could think of to say was: "Um, when?"

And he said: "Well, we need to go and look for a diamond."

I just sat there for a while with this stupid grin on my face. And then I felt like bursting out singing. "Yes!!!" I shouted. "I would love to be Mrs Langman!" This was just what I had been waiting for. To be together properly. Like adults. I was on cloud nine! I must have covered him in red powder!

We set the date for the 31<sup>st</sup> of March. A Sunday. It was the same date that both Max's brother Okkie and Max's sister Ray had gotten married, so it was already significant.

You might not believe it, but my parents were ecstatic about the engagement. They planned the whole wedding. Which was fine by me – I was just happy to have a wedding at all. In fact, they seemed to think, talk and breathe wedding. The first daughter to get married! They were determined that this would be the event of the year! Nothing was too much or too good for my father's daughter. He hired the Weitzman Hall and Krafchik caterers. He sent me off to Madam Margot's Bridal Boutique for my dream bridal-gown. He built a guest list of 500 people. Nothing short of perfection.

I think it was his reaction to everything that had happened. Or his over-reaction. He thought that he could smooth things out for me with the perfect wedding. It was his way of making things right.

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*Lynette's younger sister, Jenny, was a flower girl at the wedding and I am keen to hear her recollections of that time. She and Lynette have always been close. You can see they are sisters: the same immaculate sense of grooming with buttons just so, the same Cape-Town-girl twang, the same expertly highlighted hair. Lynette is more sedate, though. Clearly the older sister.*

*When Jenny talks, each sentence is an affair. She attaches a strong drawl to important words and her enthusiasm is infectious. She employs that distinct South Africanism of using the word 'like' as a sentence-breaker: it's a verbalised comma for people who hate to pause, a means of keeping the words flowing while the thoughts are still forming.*

Jenny:

Their wedding day was a s-t-unning Cape Town day in March. The sun was shining and, like, everyone was sooo happy. I mean, they had been dating for a long time, so eeeveryone was waiting for the wedding.

I was just a young kid, but I remember that day so well. Because of all the excitement. And I remember that my mother made me cut my bloody hair – I was so upset because I thought it was hideous and I wanted it to be perfect for my sister's big day.

Lynette was always my idol, you see, always high up in my estimation. She was the perfect older sister, and we were always very close. So when she eventually told me about the son she had even before that wedding day, I couldn't believe it. It was, like, a total miracle.

Often Lynette would say that everyone has skeletons in their closet. Only when I think back now on conversations and events over the years do I realise that she was talking about herself. And it's amazing how it's all worked out – that they all have a connection as if it has always been there, and the kids have no grudges. Lynette is so much more fulfilled now.

But what is really unbelievable to me is that, like, I don't remember anything at all about Lynette going away when I was younger. I must have been about six years old when she had the baby and I have other vivid memories about that age, but that is one thing I have no memory of. I suppose I just believed whatever my parents told me at the time. And I certainly didn't notice anything afterwards or at the wedding – no, like, bad feelings between my parents and Max or Lynette. Everything seemed normal to me.

Do I agree with what my parents did? Do I think they were in the wrong? Well, those days were so different. They did what they thought was right. Maybe if they knew that Max and Lynette would ultimately get married, maybe they would have been different.

I do think they should have sent Lynette for help, like counselling or something. I know in those days there was such a stigma attached to therapy, but how could they have expected her to come back to a normal life? And I don't know how she managed without turning against them. She never threw it in their face. If they had an argument, it never came out as ammunition or blame.

In today's times, from a modern point of view, I would say that what my parents did was wrong. But in those days, well...Maybe I would have done the same thing had I been in their shoes 40 years ago. It was a different world. Thank G-d it all worked out in the end...I keep, like, wondering to myself if Lynette would've had Jonathan if she hadn't given her first baby



away. She always wanted three kids and if she'd kept the baby, she would have had two boys and a girl so maybe she wouldn't have had a fourth child. What a thought! I mean, Jonny is the most remarkable child – I can't imagine the world without him. And it's scary because he is like a clone of Antony. It's almost like G-d gave her back what she had lost; he gave her a second chance.

When I found out about Antony, I didn't feel angry towards my parents. My father was dead and my mother was very ill. Maybe had they been alive and well, I would have felt angry. But once you lose someone, you only think of the good things, and you mellow about things you might've been upset about.

As for Lynette, I never thought 'how could she have done it?' or 'why didn't she ever tell me?' She didn't even tell her own children! I respect that. I just think about what a load it must have been for her to carry on her own.

And Max, well, he proved that he really loved her. Someone else might have been different and run away, but he didn't. What is amazing to me is that my parents let him carry on seeing Lynette! I would've thought that they would turn around and forbid her from seeing the guy who had just gotten her pregnant! But they didn't. And that makes me think that they were probably unhappy with their decision and tried to make it up to her by letting her continue the relationship with Max.

Maybe the wedding was another way that they tried to make it up to her...I mean, it was a seriously lavish affair and my father spared no expense. Maybe they wanted to give her back what she had lost, even though it was materialistic. Because that day was like a fairytale. I remember that the car we drove in to the wedding had white ribbon attached to the front so everyone was hooting at us on the way to the shul. It was the Schoonder Street shul, you know that small shul there in Oranjezicht? It's not even there anymore...

Anyway, when we got there, someone came out and told us that we couldn't come in because the groom wasn't there yet! So we drove round and round the block so that Max wouldn't see Lynette before the wedding! She wore the most beautiful dress I had ever seen. It was a creamy satin with embossing and sparkling beads all over it. Then she wore a bolero to

cover her shoulders and these long white gloves. I thought she looked like a princess. And she had this headpiece with delicate fabric flowers. I can picture my mother straightening it. She always liked things to be straight.

There were quite a few of us in the retinue. Our sister Maureen was the maid of honour and there were other pole-holders and bridesmaids. Everyone had big retinues in those days.

When you walked into the shul, all you could smell were the St Joseph lilies. Those, and white roses. There were tons of them. So we walked down to the *chuppah* with all these beautiful flowers lining the aisle. It was like a florist in there.

I remember wishing that I could one day have a wedding like that...

*After the ceremony, they headed to the hall for the reception. It was a white wedding, shimmering with candelabras and fragrant with flowers. A live band played all the popular tunes and guests whirled to the dance of the hora.*

*It was a finely orchestrated do, tuned right up to the moment when all the lights were switched off for the dessert parade. Waiters in tuxedos wheeled out trolleys, flickering with candlelight. Each trolley bore silver domes and, with a concerto flourish, the waiters whipped off the covers to reveal platters heavily laden with desserts of miniature pots-au-chocolat, rainbow petit fours, and glazed fruit. Flawless, like the night.*

*Lola's chest was puffed up with pride. "Look at my daughter," he boasted to his friends. "Isn't she beautiful? And my handsome young son-in-law. What a couple!" There was no trace of the trauma which had plagued them only 18 months before. And no hint of the fraud scandal which was silently building momentum and would torment the family in just a few years' time. Even if you had known the Zinns well, you would not have noticed the frayed edges of remorse and longing on Lynette's smiling veneer. They were well hidden by the glitz of Lola's gift – the storybook wedding.*

Lynette:

It was a perfect night. At least it went off perfectly. And I couldn't have been happier to be Mrs Max Langman.

I went outside to get some fresh air at one point, while everyone was dancing and eating. I just wanted to have a moment to myself. And while I was standing there, I felt sad. A year and a half ago, who would have thought this night was possible? It had felt like it would never happen. 'If only we had been married then,' I thought. Even on the so-called happiest night of my life, I could not ignore the guilt and the wish that things could have turned out differently with David. After all, I was now married to his father! A measly year and a half later! That single thought made the whole thing seem tragic.

That night, and every night afterwards, I sent the same prayer out into the universe for David. 'Let him be safe. Let him be happy. Let him be loved.'

Eventually, I had to go back inside and join my guests. I watched Max swirling round and round in those crazy, traditional Jewish dances. He was grinning like I'd never seen before. 'From now on,' I thought, 'I get to keep our children.'



Lynette, Max and parents at the wedding



Lynette and Lola



Lynette and Marc

## REFLECTIONS

**I**t's been nine months since my first interview with Lynette, and her whole demeanour has changed. Her whole body too. Buoyant and slimmer, it's as if she's had the womb put back into her.

Contact with Antony and trips to America have become common, although never commonplace. She has been to Seattle twice since the reunion and each visit marks another notch on the scale of real family experience. Friendship takes time. It is founded on memory and shared history, which they are slowly building. It has roses and thorns, which they are slowly negotiating – Antony with his pragmatism and capacity for infinite embrace; Lynette with her expansive emotion and eye for detail; Colin, Lara and Jonny with familial warmth; and Max with his characteristic brand of honesty.

Lynette:

After the reunion in Seattle, it was incredibly difficult to leave Antony. I tried to imprint the image of him in my mind. I didn't know what was around the next corner. 'Will I see him again?' I wondered. 'Is this going to be it?' But I had to get back to reality... and back to the lies, because there were so many people who still didn't know.

After we got home, Antony sent an email to over 100 people, telling them about our story and reunion. When I checked the distribution list, I realised that there were people I knew on it, people I hadn't told the story to. I suddenly had this flash of realisation that now the whole world would know the truth! There I was again: walking naked down Adderley Street...

My email correspondence with Antony grew less and less. But that's only because the phone calls increased. Email felt too impersonal after our meeting and our conversations got longer and longer. Today, email is virtually non-existent with us. We know how to talk comfortably...

*As she talks about this, I am reminded of something that Eileen Jordaan said about Antony and the Langmans. Based on her experience of hundreds of adoptions, the social worker observed: "Many reunions are successful at the time. But they fizzle out. There is great excitement at the beginning and then the adoptee, especially if they are quite young, goes on with their life. In this particular case, however, I don't think it will fade. Antony has found both parents and full-blood siblings...They seem to just fit."*

*Lynette is certainly comfortable with her new-found son. His picture melts into the general family milieu framed throughout her house; his family's faces are part of the collection. But Lynette's tone is hushed, now. Reflective.*

Lynette:

It's been an adjustment since that wonderful reunion. Reality always is. There were other people I had to tell, and the news grew beyond just me and my immediate family. People started to talk, as Capetonians do – or I suppose as any humans do. The story took on a life of its own.

As you know, my mother never knew that I met Antony. Whether she knew that I had found him and started a correspondence with him, I'll never know. But she had died by the time we went to Seattle and she never witnessed the absolute joy that that visit brought.

After the adoption, my parents had never spoken about him. In fact, my mother only ever mentioned him once. One afternoon, just before she got ill, my mother came round to my house for tea, as she often did. I wasn't working at the time and we would sit and chat over a good strong cup of Five Roses, which she loved. This particular day was a glorious winter one. The sun was streaming onto the balcony and the sky was bright. I got up and went into the kitchen to start preparing dinner. My mother followed.

She stood looking out the window, staring at the mountain, with her back to me. And then, out of the blue, she said: "Lynette, do you ever think about that child that we made you give up?" Out of nowhere. After 40 years of silence.

I couldn't see her face, but I responded: "What do you think? Of course I think about him. Every day. I've never stopped."

There was silence. So I asked: "Why are you mentioning this now?"

She turned to face me and replied: "Before I came here today, there was a programme on the radio. Adopted children were phoning in to give information, looking for their biological parents. One young man sounded so much like Colin. It just made me wonder..." She was very pensive, just stood there with her arms folded. "When I look back now, I think that maybe we should have said 'to hell with society' and let you keep the baby."

I could not believe my ears. I heard her voice as if it was coming from faaaaaar away, down a long tunnel. I was overwhelmed by so much emotion and, for some strange reason, a flood of pity. I felt that I had to console *her*. As if it was *her* loss. So I said: "Mom, you are speaking now, in today's times. Cast your mind back to those days. Things were different then. You and Daddy did what you thought was best for me. But yes," I said, "sometimes, when the phone rings and there's no-one there, I think 'Is that my son trying to contact me?' I'm sure it's not, but I'll tell you one thing: One day I *will* know what happened to him."

After that, she fell silent and I didn't push it. This was the most frank conversation we had ever had and it came as a shock to me. It was the first time she had opened up and spoken

about David. Until then, I didn't even know if she remembered him, let alone felt sorry about it. I felt bad for her, though. I realised that she did carry immense guilt, but was simply unable to express it. She had a tough exterior, my mother. But she was obviously softer on the inside than I'd have expected. And there would have been no point in blame. I even said to her: "It's water under the bridge." She suffered in her own way.

This was ten minutes of truth. Ten minutes, and the door was shut again. Like sea-water filling up a hole in the sand. She never mentioned it again.

But I felt raw, as if a plaster had just been ripped off a fresh wound. For a while afterwards, I was tearful and shaken. I began to think, 'What if they had stood by me? What if I had been able to keep him?' It was as if my mother had opened the door to all those possibilities again and I felt distressed.

But then I thought about all that I did have – my husband, my children, my grandchildren – and I knew that I had a lot to be grateful for. It was useless, harmful, to dwell on the past and what could have been. I had to concentrate on what I had gained rather than on what I had lost.

I don't know what prompted me to tell my mother that 'one day I will know what happened to him.' It just came out and at that moment, I was convinced. One day, I would know...

My father never once made reference to the baby. For him it was a closed book. Funny, I hear that a friend of Antony's used to nickname him 'Clarke Gable'...I wonder what my father would have thought of all that's happened now...

Aunty Milly was around at the time of the reunion, though – my mother's sister. She was living in Highlands House, the Jewish Aged Home, and I went to see her just before we left for Seattle. She cried like a baby when I told her the news, just couldn't get enough of the story. She was such a special woman, Aunty Milly – more modern than my mother. She played piano, went to the races, played cards...But she didn't have an easy life: they struggled to make a living and her son died of AIDS. She had a heart attack some time ago and passed away. I think her heart was just exhausted. But she died quickly – true to her nature, she went without a fuss.

Remember Uncle Mike? Our friend and family doctor who ‘discovered’ my pregnancy? He was actually present at all my children’s births. Dr Shapiro would ask who I wanted to assist and I’d immediately suggest Uncle Mike. He was a constant throughout my life. But he died before the reunion, before ever knowing that I’d found Antony. I remember standing at his funeral, wishing that he could have lived to see the outcome. He would have been so relieved at how things turned out...

Dr Solly Lison did get to hear the end of the story. Max went to see him after the reunion and took pictures of Antony. He said to Solly, “Do you know who this is?”

“He looks familiar,” said Solly.

“That is Antony Egnal.”

“Of course,” Solly replied. “I remember him. What a wonderful guy. I was so impressed with him when he worked with me!”

To which Max, deadpan as ever, responded: “He is also my son.”

Max:

There are very few people I’ve discussed this all with – maybe half a dozen at most. I’ve kept it under wraps – I was used to doing that after so many years. And I find that most people shy away from the truth. The average person won’t come up to me and start talking about it. It would have to be a person with a big beck, like me!

For 40 years, we got away with nobody knowing about this. Those years were very difficult for Lynette. Me, I was busy dealing with real life and I pushed it to the background. But now that the truth is out, people just can’t believe it. They can’t believe that they never knew. My sister is still flabbergasted! And people just can’t get over how well the whole family has handled it, how well it all worked out. I suppose I can’t really believe it either.

Colin:

That reunion was one of the defining moments of my life. For my mom and dad, well, their nerves were shot in the build-up to the reunion. I remember when we got off the plane in Seattle and walked onto the escalator to the arrivals hall. My dad is not one to show physical



affection, but he and my mom put their arms out to each other and walked, hand-in-hand, down that ramp. And I thought to myself: 'Shit, this has got to be hard for you.'

When we came down that escalator, there were lights and noise and people shouting. I remember looking through the chaos and then, Boom! There they were!

It was the most incredible moment of my entire life. To see my mother grab my brother and hug him.

By the time we met, we'd already done quite a bit of communicating. But to hold this guy in my arms...

You try and comprehend what it must have been like. I still can't put myself in my mom and dad's shoes. If this had happened to me and Judy, could we have kept the secret for 40 years? It's amazing that they handled it as well as they did. And it's amazing how it all worked out...

I don't feel differently towards my parents now. And I don't feel inferior. To me, it feels like it's always been this way, having Antony in our lives. So what that I'm no longer the first-born? What difference does that make in my life?

People always ask questions. They can't believe that I can just accept it like that. But I have to tell you: even if Antony was the biggest *shmuck* on earth, he would still be my brother.

Lynette:

I am continually amazed by the coincidences in our story. It gives me shivers to think about the many times the course of our lives crossed Antony's over the years. The association with Dr Solly Lison; Lara being at Antony's wedding; our surnames; important dates like the 31<sup>st</sup> of March; idiosyncrasies like marshmallow fish; the fact that he and his adoptive parents lived just houses away from us in Camps Bay; family names...the links are all over the place! And they are still emerging. I just remembered that years ago, my sister Maureen asked me what I thought she should name her son. Of all the names in the world, and for no apparent reason, I picked the name 'Anton'...Why that name above anything else? My nephew was named just one 'y' short of the cousin he never knew he had. It's just bizarre...

Jonny:

The crossovers are amazing in this story but you know, the dynamic of Antony's adoptive family was virtually the same as ours. That's what blurs the whole nature/nurture debate here. There was no huge disparity in our upbringings so we filled in the gaps easily and found lots of commonality in our background. That made us much more able to relate when we finally all got together; we didn't come from worlds apart.

I've been living in Seattle for almost a year now, and for the first six months, I lived with Antony and René. I now live five minutes up the road from them and I've come to know them intimately. Ant is a lot more like my father than one realises. He is very emotionally controlled and doesn't volunteer feelings easily. I've heard him tell the story of his adoption and reunion: he tells it with great build-up and anticipation, but not a lot of emotion. He's incredibly articulate and speaks easily, so you won't find any reticence when talking to him...but if you look closely, you'll realise that he doesn't share deep emotion easily.

Interestingly, I'm probably closer to Ren than to Ant because she is a more emotional person and that suits my character. I can talk about anything with her. But Ant and I do great guy things together – like getting up at 5am to watch South Africa play rugby. Those 'ordinary' things are special. Antony once said to me: "I've waited my whole life to watch rugby with my brother." I admire him as a husband and father, and for the passion he has for what he does – he is the most dedicated doctor.

I think his response to the whole reunion has been amazing. His open-mindedness set the scene and the level at which we would interact. I mean, imagine inviting eight strangers to your house to stay without ever having laid eyes on most of them! The way he approached the reunion meant that it was never going to be a disaster. Yes, everyone was nervous beforehand but if you think about it, it was never going to be a slaughterhouse. He wouldn't have acted the way he did beforehand – with all the phone calls, emails and invitations – if he didn't intend to see it through.

Many factors conspired to make it work out the way it did for us, many subtle factors. Even when I tell the story, I hesitate, because not all adoption scenarios end up this way. We were

lucky. But there are many things to take away from this story in addition to the happy ending. There are so many fascinating facets.

What struck me during the reunion was that the kids were a good beacon for how we should all approach it. Yael and Micaela bonded immediately and took off as friends, with no holds barred. For Yael, my mom was '*Bobba*' after only three days. Those kids did it right, because they kept it simple. You've got to go with the feeling and keep it simple; don't make things more complicated than they need to be.

So that's how I've tried to approach the reunion and relationship with Ant and his family. It was different for Lynette, though. She still holds back. She still can't define exactly what her role is. She will never be 'Mom', but she is already 'Granny'. It's more complicated for her. That's her tightrope and she prefers to err on the side of caution – she won't force herself on anyone.

Lynette:

Ant's adoptive parents never knew that he found his birth parents and struck up such a good relationship with us. I often think about them, Joe and Selma. I wish I could have had the chance to thank them for raising my...their...our...son the way they did. But who knows? Maybe it's better this way for all of us. Antony can have a relationship with us without feeling like he's hurting his adoptive parents or being disloyal. And we don't have to compete with anybody...Well, not physically anyway. But in truth I think there is a remnant of psychological or emotional competition. I'd be lying if I said I didn't feel it.

I remember one time, during the reunion trip to Seattle, I went into the kitchen where Antony was preparing a meal and I said, "Gee, you're domesticated."

"Yes," he replied. "My mother taught me..."

It just came out so naturally for him. Selma was his mother. But for me, it was hard to hear. I realised then that there would be many hard things to hear. I have to keep reminding myself that he had a mother and father for many years. And I admire them – they did such an incredible job! I know I must be grateful for what I have. It's so much more than I could have wished for! In my early emails to Ant, I told him that he should talk freely about his parents

with us. But I have to admit that somewhere, deep inside me, I'd like to hear him call me "Mom".

*Lynnette blushes slightly – just a slight flush under her face-powder. Then she looks away quickly, as if by breaking eye contact, she can retract the admission. Her eyes rest on the shelf above the TV, where a full row of books is dedicated to the subject of adoption. The spine of each book is cracked from use, splintered by concentration. She sees me staring at them. "I've read others too," she says. "But they belong to the book club. I haven't told all the girls about Antony, but the adoption stories just seem to find their way into the club regardless."*

*She gets up to stand at the open window. It's a sunny winter's day, of the type that is becoming all the more common as the polar ice caps melt and the world's thermostat heats up. Still, the air bites back as it enters the lounge.*

It's not all roses, you know. It's *mostly* roses, but not all the time.

At some point after the reunion, I was walking through the grounds of the Gardens Shul during the daytime. They were busy preparing for a *barmitzvah*, so the shul doors were open. I sat down in the back row, just to watch and think. It struck me that I had missed Antony's *barmitzvah* – just as I had missed his birthdays, his graduation and his wedding; just as I had missed his first day of school and his voice breaking. These were moments that would never be repeated, and I had missed them forever. For a while, I felt inconsolably sad. I still do when I think about it. How does one catch up on a life? Have I lost too much time? Will I ever be able to truly earn a son's love for his mother?

I still feel guilty for giving Ant away. Despite his assurances and the fact that he had a good life, some part of me still feels real remorse. I think that's just my burden to bear. I no longer feel any anger towards my parents for their decision. When I became a mother myself, I realised that my parents did what they thought was best for me at the time. I suppose they also did what was best for them – they were so afraid of the scandal. It must have been hard for them too, giving up their first grandchild. Especially a boy!

I do feel sad that they never met Antony and weren't part of the reunion. I know that they would have been happy for me. I'm sure that they too were riddled with guilt. I'm sure that the birth of each of my children brought back memories for them. My Dad spoilt my kids rotten and although he was mad about them, the guilt probably had something to do with it.

Yes, it was my parents' decision, but I still harbour guilt of my own. I hope that it doesn't interfere with my relationship with Ant; it's just something I must live with because I don't think it will ever go away. Even if we build the most incredible bond, I will never be able to make up for the years that I've lost. At the same time, I find myself worrying about becoming too familiar with Ant; when we chat, I'm always aware of not wanting to say the wrong thing. I still don't know him well enough to make any assumptions, and I never want to insult or upset him. I wish I could tell him how much I love him, but I'm too scared. I don't know if he will ever truly 'love' me and Max, but I am thankful that at least he cares for us.

I know it doesn't help to wonder 'what if', but I can't help thinking that if we hadn't given Ant up for adoption, we might never have had Jonathan, our fourth child. I simply can't imagine our lives without him, or any of my children for that matter. I am so grateful that my kids accepted Antony into their lives and continued to show such love and respect to me and Max. And I am so grateful that Antony continues to make contact with us – and not only that: he has welcomed the family members into his life with open arms. Jonny has even moved to Seattle because of him! Lara visits often and they all take family trips together, just as if they had grown up in the same household. So I am lucky.

Max:

The first time I spoke to Antony on the phone, he was a total stranger. I mean, 40 years is a long time! I found it difficult to make any kind of meaningful conversation. After the reunion it became a bit easier to talk, but I still find that it's not the same as with my other children. With Antony, I can go so far and no further; and he can go so far with me, and no further.

There are times when I can speak to him for ten or fifteen minutes, no problem. Other times I struggle. I speak to all my children at least once a week. I can speak to Jon for an hour. I can't do it with Antony. I can speak to Colin about finances and business. I can't do it with Antony. I mean, I can ask him how his family is doing and how his practice is doing, but I can't

ask him about his turnover, like I would with one of my other children. I haven't got the right to pry. I know he's very successful, but I don't feel I have the right to pry...Even now, after three years.

I think Lynette experiences a reticence too, never mind what she tells you. I can hear it in her conversations. I have to scream at her to get off the phone to Lara or Colin or Jonny, but with Antony it's different.

He is the most wonderful guy though. I remember during that reunion week he kissed me on the head once. Amazing! It was just his way of expressing his feelings. He even referred to me as his father when he introduced me to people. This whole thing must be difficult for him – I mean, what an adjustment! But he is managing well, being the type of person he is. I can see why his patients love him – he has the most amazing manner.

Still, I find that there's a barrier with him. During our trips to Seattle, after two or three days, it's already better. But on the phone, living our normal lives, it's usually five or six minutes of slow conversation. I don't think that will change. Perhaps if I lived in Seattle it would be different...

Antony:

I know that I am lucky because not all adoption stories turn out this way. My own adoptive sister had a very different experience. Soon after the records opened up in South Africa, and after my parents died, she tracked down her birth-mother: a Jewish lady who had moved on in her life, was married with three kids. But she never furthered the relationship with my sister. It was difficult for me to pluck up the courage to present my sister with the news that I had the 'silver spoon squarely placed in my mouth' as she always saw it, especially with this adoption fairy tale. My sister and I were always very different, and she wasn't as close to my parents – they had had a difficult relationship growing up. We do have some contact these days, but it's not a happy part of the tale.

Mandy:

What do I think of Antony's story with his biological parents? It's amazing. He is so lucky. I am jealous. It's not the type of story you hear every day. I mean, his sister was at his wedding!

You don't hear things as dramatic as Antony's story. Of course the possibility for coincidence is higher, being Jewish, because it's such a small world, especially in South Africa. And I think the Jewish adoption files are kept separately. Obviously, there are not that many of them. But still, Antony's story is just unbelievable. And I think he's happy that he did it, that he contacted his birth mother. And of course it's the exact opposite of my story. Mine doesn't have such a happy ending. It's been hard to deal with what happened. I write poetry and I've contributed to the Adoption Reunion website. And I often re-read the letter that Irene, the social worker from the adoption centre in Cape Town, sent to me after I found my biological mother. But it's been hard.

Antony:

I have often mulled over the question of whether things would've been different had my adoptive parents been alive at the time of that first phone call and the reunion. Of course I was very close to them and would never have wanted to hurt them. I know I wouldn't have contacted the Langmans without first having discussed my reasons with them. I think my mom would initially have been hurt by the prospect. She gave up everything for her children. She had no fixed hobbies or interests. She did play tennis in her earlier years but ultimately gave that up as well to concentrate entirely on her family.

So given how dedicated she was to us, I believe she might have taken offence at the idea of my looking for my biological mother. My dad was far less emotional about these things and would have been fine with it all. But I'm sure that ultimately, after discussing it thoroughly, my mom would have been perfectly accepting of the idea – especially due to the closeness of our relationship, the circumstances surrounding Marc's adoption, and my motivation for my search.

There's no denying that our story is a remarkable one. Our lives have changed dramatically since that initial phone call. I look at my little boy every single day and can't wait to tell him what an impact he has had on everybody's lives in bringing so many people together.

## POSTSCRIPT

Lynette:

I am disappointed that I never got to meet and thank Antony's adoptive parents.

I did visit their gravesites. Ant had told me that his mother is buried at the Jewish cemetery in Cape Town; there is plaque for his father there too. So I drove the long, flat road through Pinelands to the cemetery and asked one of the keepers to show me to the graves. We walked amongst the tombstones of the cemetery. It's a huge place – a wide stretch of land with a panoramic view of Table Mountain. It feels windswept and desolate, despite its population of hundreds and hundreds of graves.

The keeper stopped at the end of a row and pointed. I thanked him and walked in the direction he indicated. There was something about this space – an odd sensation that made me feel as if I had forgotten something I should have remembered, like when you go blank on a good friend's name for a split-second.

There was a plaque for Joe Egnal and a small tombstone for Selma – “Her energy was the life blood of all those who knew her”. I looked around, feeling strangely uncomfortable. And then I realised...

Antony's adoptive parents are buried only a few places away from my own parents, Tilly and Lola Zinn. Their graves are in the same single row that I have visited every year for the past 18 years.



## GLOSSARY

barmitzvah	(Hebrew) A Jewish boy's celebration of coming of age, held around the time of his 13 <sup>th</sup> birthday
Bobba	(Yiddish) 'Grandma'
Bobbemeis	(Yiddish) 'old wives' tale'
Boet	(Afrikaans) 'brother'
boytjie	(Afrikaans) Slang for 'little boy'
Bris Milah	(Hebrew) A Jewish boy's circumcision, held eight days after birth
chuppah	(Hebrew) The bridal canopy used in Jewish weddings
de heim	(Yiddish) 'home', often used to refer to Eastern Europe or the 'old country'
Goldene Medine	(Yiddish) 'Golden Land'
Hagadah	(Hebrew) The book used during Passover to tell the story of the Jewish exodus from Egypt in biblical times
Hey, gaan sê vir jou ma daars vis	(Afrikaans) 'Hey, go tell your mother there's fish'
hora	(Hebrew) A brisk Israeli dance
Kaput	(German) 'destroyed', used in Yiddish slang to mean 'finished'
keyn einhore	(Yiddish) An expression meaning 'No evil eye'
kiende	(Yiddish) 'children'
klaib nachas	(Yiddish) An expression meaning 'to get pleasure from another's achievements'
Kugel	(Yiddish) A type of pudding, used in South African slang to refer to a dolled up, pretentious girl or woman
lechaim	(Hebrew) A toast, meaning 'to life'
matzah	(Hebrew) The unleavened bread used during Passover

mikveh	(Hebrew) A pool of ritual immersion used primarily by Jewish women
Mohel	(Hebrew) A Jewish person certified to conduct the Bris Milah circumcision in accordance with the guidelines of the faith
Nogal	(Afrikaans) Slang for 'what's more'
Pesach	(Hebrew) The Jewish festival of Passover, commemorating the exodus of Jews from Egypt in biblical times
Pisha	(Yiddish) 'pipsqueak'
Sabra	(Hebrew) prickly pear
Seder	(Hebrew) The Jewish ceremonial meal held during Passover
Shabbat	(Hebrew) The Jewish Sabbath day
shande	(Yiddish) 'scandal'
shlump	(Yiddish) 'untidy person'
shmuck	(Yiddish) derisive term referring to 'penis', but used as slang to mean 'fool'
Shtum	(Yiddish) 'quiet'
simchas	(Hebrew) 'joyous occasions'
skinderbek	(Afrikaans) 'gossipmonger'
slap chips	(Afrikaans) Slang referring to soggy French fries soaked in oil and vinegar
Stoep	(Afrikaans) 'veranda' or 'porch'
teiglach	(Yiddish) A traditional sticky biscuit consisting of balls of dough cooked in honey and brown sugar
weeeeet djy maar wat	(Afrikaans) Slang pronunciation for 'Do you know what?'
Yom Tov	(Hebrew) Literally 'A good day' referring to a Jewish holiday
Zeida	(Yiddish) 'Grandpa'